

## HEARING GOD – GOD STILL SPEAKS TODAY

Back when the telegraph was the fastest method of long-distance communication, a young man applied for a job as a Morse Code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper, he went to the office address that was listed. When he arrived, he entered a large, busy office filled with noise and clatter, including the sound of the telegraph in the background. A sign on the receptionist's counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office. The young man filled out his form and sat down with the several other applicants in the waiting area. After a few minutes, the young man stood up, crossed the room to the door of the inner office, and walked right in. Naturally the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. They muttered among themselves that they hadn't heard any summons yet. They assumed that the young man who went into the office made a mistake and would be disqualified. Within a few minutes, however, the employer escorted the young man out of the office and said to the other applicants, "Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, but the job has just been filled."

The other applicants began grumbling to each other, and one spoke up saying, "Wait a minute, I don't understand. He was the last to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair!" The employer said, "I'm sorry, but all the time you've been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the following message in Morse Code: 'If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours.' All of you heard it but did not understand it. This young man did so the job is his."

We live in a world that is full of busyness and clatter, like that office. People are distracted and unable to hear the still, small voice of God as he speaks to them. What about you? Are you tuned in to God's voice? Do you hear him when he speaks to you?

Today we are starting a new 6 week series called Hearing God. Throughout the series we will be having a workshop where we will be providing the opportunity for everyone to not only hear but to practically use what we will be talking about.

Why are we doing this series? Because hearing God is important. You cannot understand God's will for your life without hearing His voice. You cannot be truly obedient if you do not know what God is asking you to do.

Hab 2:1 I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. 2 Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it."

When I was growing up, what I heard mostly in church was that God does not really speak to us today. Christians who hold to this position are called Cessationists. They believe that there are some gifts of the Spirit that are still available to us today but that other more 'miraculous' gifts ended with the Apostles.

It is through the Holy Spirit that we hear God speak.

1. Hearing God's Illuminated Word

We need the Holy Spirit to understand the bible, God's written word. God speaks to us through His word. There are those who downplay the role of the Holy Spirit when it comes to reading the bible. We wrongly see charismatics as those who focus on the Holy Spirit and conservatives as those who focus on the bible. There are those who believe that the best interpreters of God's revelation are the ones who have the best interpretive methods, most knowledge in the original biblical languages and the historical backgrounds of the biblical period – the ones most educated and disciplined.

I am not saying that these are bad things. However, it is interesting that the people in the day of Jesus who knew the scriptures the most completely missed the fact that He was the Messiah. Scripture can't be properly understood apart from the revealing ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is interesting that none of the people that showed up to witness the birth of Jesus had found their own way there. They all were people who had been given direct revelation from God: Mary was told by an angel; Joseph had a dream; the shepherds heard it from angels; The Magi followed the star; Simeon and Anna were both told where to find Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The most striking absence at the manger were the Bible scholars of the day!

John 5:39-40 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Jesus repeatedly said that the Holy Spirit is essential in truly understanding biblical truth.

John 14:25-26 All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Luke 10:21 At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

Even after Jesus had risen from the dead His own disciples still did not truly understand what was happening. If this is true of the men and women who had walked and lived with Jesus for 3 years, how much more is it true for each one of us?

Luke 24:44-45 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you were reading the bible and you read something that you had read many times before but then all of a sudden, the words just seemed to leap off the page and impact you in a new way?

There was a time when the Apostle Peter needed to have his theology corrected. Peter believed as did most Jews that people from other races were unclean. This is what he had been taught all his life. God had clearly stated to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 that the Gentiles also were included in His plan of salvation, but over the years that fact had been lost. So God had to speak directly to Peter through a vision in Acts 10 to correct him. He did this so that Peter would be willing to go to the home of Cornelius to share the Gospel. God had to correct his theology.

There has been many times in my own life where that has happened as well. In fact, I would say that if God has never corrected your theology or doctrine in anything, perhaps you haven't really been listening! The Spirit helps us to hear God by illuminated His written word.

## 2. Hearing God's Individual Word

We need the Holy Spirit to understand God's Rhema or spoken word. Cessationists use 1 Cor. 13 to support their idea that God does not still speak directly to us apart from the Bible anymore.

1Co 13:8-10 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

There will be a day when prophecy and tongues and other speaking gifts will cease, but when will that be? It says when perfection comes. What does that mean? Cessationists say that perfection refers to the completed canon of Scripture. They say that the speaking gifts authenticated the apostles' teaching and were necessary until the Scriptures were completed; but now that the bible is complete that they are not required so they are no longer available.

However, we do not have to wonder about this interpretation of what perfection means, the following verses tell us clearly.

1Co 13:11-12 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Paul is saying that perfection comes when we see God face to face. That means the second coming. It means when we go to be with Jesus in heaven. Now we know in part, then we shall know fully. Does that mean when the bible was finalized? Do you understand everything fully today just because you have the completed Scriptures? Of course not. There is lots of things that I do not understand fully. However, I know that one day I will, and that is when I go to be with Jesus.

The bible clearly shows time after time that God spoke directly to people. This was also evidenced in the early church and down through history. People like Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, John Wesley, George Mueller, Andrew Murray, C.H. Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, Lauren Cunningham and many others. Great hymns of faith point to the same experience: "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us" and "All the Way, My Savior Leads Me" and "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" just to name a few.

These additional revelations do not compromise Scripture, for they're a very different type of revelation! The Bible reliably fixes the boundaries of what God will ever say to humankind. So then, knowledge of the Bible acts as a filter through which the events of our daily lives must pass before we can discern if God is truly speaking in these events.

If a young man asks about marrying a non-Christian girlfriend, his feelings may be telling him this is right. However, it contradicts what the written Word says. The feelings must be rejected.

God will never tell us individually anything that contradicts what He has written us in His word. The Spirit helps us to hear God by illuminated His written word and communicating His individual word.

### 3. Hearing God's Word Practically

There are those that are hearing this sermon today that fully understand what I am talking about because they regularly hear God speaking to them. They have gotten into the practice of listening to God and are able to discern His voice. There are also those listening to this today that have no idea of what I am talking about. The whole idea of hearing God speak to you sounds foreign. That is one of the reasons we are doing this series. We are not simply in saying that this is something that CAN happen but helping people to actually DO this and make it a regular practice.

So how do you hear from God. It is through listening prayer. What does that look like?

Hab 2:1 I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. 2 Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it."

WITHDRAW – I will ... station myself on the ramparts

To hear God speak the first thing you need to do is withdraw. That means get alone in a quiet place. In Hebrew the word used here for ramparts is MATSOWR which means an enclosed protective structure. Sometimes it is translated as TOWER. It means to find a secluded place alone. To go off by yourself, and eliminate external distractions so you can hear God speak.

Find a place where you can be quiet and get alone with God and listen. One of the reasons why we often do not hear God speak is because we are constantly surrounded by noise. The radio is always on, the TV is always on, etc. The first step is you need to withdraw and get off by yourself. Get alone in a quiet place.

Luke 5:15 The news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. 16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed

Jesus withdrew often. He made it a habit – a necessary part of his ministry. If He needed to do it, we certainly do as well. We need to get away from the distractions. Get alone, removing every external distraction possible. E.g. hearing God when the youth went to the mall.

WAIT – I will stand at my watch

If simply withdrawing was all that was needed for you to hear God's voice then it would be easy. However, there is more to it than that. After you get in a quiet spot then you need to learn to quiet yourself, your own mind and your own emotions. Waiting means calming your thoughts and emotions. You need to quiet yourself down. Habakkuk says "I will stand at my watch". The word for stand is AMAD which means to wait or remain. To stand means that you don't move about, you stay put, you are still. Habakkuk is saying that he is going to stand there until he can hear God. God speaks to the person who takes the time to listen.

This is one of the reasons I love fishing. For me it is a time of prayer. As you sit there with nothing to do waiting for the fish to bite you calm your heart and wait for God to speak as well.

The one reason why many of us don't hear God is we're just too busy. Hurry is the death of prayer. If you're going to hear God speak, not only do you need to get in a quiet spot but then you must mentally and emotionally calm yourself down too. Here's the typical prayer experience. You're going to pray today and so get off by yourself. Maybe you happen to find a quiet place. But the moment you set down to pray, your mind starts reminding you of everything you haven't done yet. I find because I think at high RPM's about 90% of the time, when I sit down to talk to God, my mind is racing. If you're ever wondering what you have to do today, just set down and start to pray and you'll think of it all real quick.

Waiting takes time. It's difficult to calm down in a hurry, it can't be forced. Have you ever tried to force yourself to go to sleep. It doesn't work. E.g. driving home and then trying to sleep. The harder you try to sleep, the more awake you are! You just have to wait until your mind calms down and you go to sleep. You must withdraw and then you wait in silence, which calms your thoughts and your emotions.

2 Kings 3: 14 Elisha said "... 15 ... now bring me a harpist." While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came upon Elisha

I've often found in my own life sometimes the quickest way to calm down is to put on a praise tape or some slow Christian music. I just start listening to it and it shifts my body, mind, and emotions into a lower gear so I can learn to hear God. Once your body is still and once your mind is quiet then you become sensitive to hearing God speak. Inner calm opens the intercom to God and you can hear Him.

WATCH - I will look to see what he will say to me

The next step is to listen. Habakkuk said "I will look to see what he will say to me." The key word there is LOOK. An important key to hearing God is to understand that God's voice is often visual. I have found that God often speaks to me through a mental picture. There are many examples of this in scripture. God gave us the ability to imagine. Sometimes we think that imagination just means daydreaming and comes from our own mind or worse. But using your sanctified imagination is an important part of the Christian life.

Eph 1:18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

What does that mean "the eyes of your heart will be opened". I thought my eyes were in my head? He's not talking about physical eyes. He's talking about spiritual eyes. Spiritual senses. When you were born physically you got a set of physical senses. Hear, taste, touch, smell, feel. When you were born spiritually you got reborn and got a set of spiritual senses: spiritual eyes, spiritual ears. Have you ever been reading the Bible and comes across a verse you have read a dozen times but all of a sudden it pops out at you? God just opened your spiritual eyes.

Studies have shown that between 50-75% of the population sees in pictures. When you read the Bible you don't just read the story, you see the story in your mind. You can see it happening. E.g. the importance of illustrations in a message – you see the point and remember it (for years after). If you are a visual learner it's going to be easier for you to let God give you a picture. For the rest you need to develop that ability. One way is to simply pray "Jesus, is there anything You want to show me? Do You want to give me an idea, an impression?"

**WRITE** - write down the revelation and make it plain

Notice what the Lord says to Habakkuk next. He told him to write down the revelation. When seeking to hear God's voice it is important to be ready to record what He tells you. Start by writing down your prayers. This is called journaling. Almost every great Christian in history has journalized. They wrote down their prayers, what they wanted to say to God and then they would write down what they felt God answered.

There are many benefits to developing this habit of journalizing. In the first place it keeps you focused. It gives your body something to do while you're praying. Your mind won't wander when you're writing down what you're trying to think about.

Another benefit is it allows you to remember what you've said to God and what God has said back to you. You don't have to learn a lesson over and over. Because you wrote it down and you go back and review it.

A third benefit is that later it allows you to test the impression. The Bible says real clearly that not every idea you get is from God. Some of them are from the devil, some of them are from God, some of them are self inspired. How do you test it? We will talk more in the coming weeks.

**WORSHIP** – Celebrating God's response

Hab 3:2 LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD.

After hearing God's reply Habakkuk responds through worship. He says, now that you've spoken to me, I love You and I want to express my love to You. God wants to have a conversation with you. We talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus – but how can you have a relationship to a person without talking. If you do all the talking, you don't have a relationship.

This is the difference in knowing about God and knowing God. There are really three kinds of relationships you can have. You can believe in God. That's the lowest form of relationship. Or you can be acquainted with God. That's a little bit deeper relationship. Or you can be the friend of God. Jesus wants that kind of relationship to you. He says, I want to call you my friends, where we commune and discuss and dialogue and converse and know each other. God wants you to be His friend.

What is the difference between them? Experience. It is not enough to simply know *about* something but to have an experience of it. When it comes to hearing God, I do not simply want you to simply hear this message today or even to just accept it as truth, you need to practice it. With that in mind, after the service today we will have a time when we can practically do these things together.