



Can You Hear It?

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If God did not speak, the world would not exist.

If God did not speak, we would have no idea how to know Him.

If God did not speak, every person would be a law unto themselves and might would be right.

But God has spoken! And God is speaking today!

Two weeks ago, I addressed the question, “If God has a voice, how has it been heard?” We learned...

The Bible records God’s verbal communications through the Trinity, and angels, and humans (typically priests, prophets, and kings), especially Jesus, His apostles, and the rest of the Church (His followers).

In the distant past, God also communicated non-verbally, which we may observe in the biblical record of the Trinity creating the world, the formation of humanity, the judgment/salvation of the Global Flood, the identification of a people (the descendants of Abraham), the emancipation and socialization of that people under Moses, the recovery from their unbelief through the prophets, and the redemption brought by Jesus, the Suffering Messiah.

And today (and tomorrow), God continues to speak by the proclamation of the Church of Jesus Christ, and the world’s renovation at the return of Jesus, the Head of the Church and the world’s Conquering King.

The ways in which God speaks include:

- The created world (hidden)
- Audible words (rarely)
- Impressions (Spirit gifts)
- Visitations, visions, dreams
- Oral transmission (from one generation to another)
- Scripture (preserved in the Bible)
- Proclamation (words spoken in His name)

Last Sunday, Pastor Tim passionately emphasized the need not only to *hear* what God has to say—whether that is through Bible reading and study or Bible preaching and teaching, as interpreted by the Holy Spirit—but also to *do* what God instructs us to do, in the context of loving one another, as Jesus Himself commanded us.

Jesus is not only the life and the truth... He is also the way, the process, the day-by-day journey of your life. His objective is not simply to impart information about the Kingdom of God, but, if we're listening, to impart His Spirit so we might walk out what we've heard as children of the Kingdom—listening and doing.

The voice of the Lord is present and powerful... Can you hear it?

Ears to Hear

Two things are required for you to hear God speaking, which Jesus told us plainly. The first thing that is required of you is to “have ears to hear.” Jesus said repeatedly, *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear”* (Mark 4:23).

Now, almost every human being is born with ears, though some are physically incapable of hearing tonal sounds. So, when Jesus said, *“If anyone has ears...”* He must have meant something more than physical ears, or even the physiological capacity to hear tonal sounds. This was a spiritual admonition—His emphasis was not “has ears,” but “ears to hear.”

“Ears to hear” describes an inner capacity, initiated by one’s own willingness, to hear, not just sound, but truth; specifically, God’s truth, God’s voice, even when He communicates things I am not accustomed to hearing or receiving. Jesus spoke to those whose hearts were open to hear what He had to say, open to hear the voice of God. Have your ears been opened in that way?

You cannot open your ears on your own; God must open them for you. Fortunately, He wants to, and endeavors to do so repeatedly throughout your lifetime. Let me illustrate with Bible passages about the relationship with slaves or servants:

“If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years [the occasion for this would likely be to offset a debt that could not be paid (not a kidnapping or hostile takeover)]; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone. But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,’ then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to

the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently” (Exodus 21:2-6).

So Moses wrote again in Deuteronomy 15 (16-17): *“It shall come about if [your servant] says to you, ‘I will not go out from you,’ because he loves you and your household, since he fares well with you; then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also you shall do likewise to your maidservant.”*

This act of piercing the ear was freely taken on by the slave, who preferred to serve his master for life. It was a mark, not of ownership, but of willing submission. The pierced ear declared to others the slave’s love of his job, and his master’s kindness; it was a pact of love, not force. Kind of like a wedding ring, but more physically personal.

In the Bible we can see this same symbolism applied to one’s spiritual relationship with God.

“Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; My ears You have opened; burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.

“Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart’” (Psalm 40:6-8).

The phrase “You have opened” comes from the Hebrew *karAH*, which means “to bore a hole.” This is not about tonal hearing, but spiritual submission. That’s why he also sang, *“I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart.”* We find the same from the prophet Isaiah:

“The Lord God has opened My ear; and I was not disobedient, nor did I turn back” (Isaiah 50:5).

It is this attitude, this loving surrender that Jesus referred to when He said, *“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”* He meant, if your spiritual ear has been pierced—if your life is centered around God and His Word, if you have given yourself for life to the service of the Lord, if you intend to obey—then listen to what I say.

If you want to hear the voice of God, the first thing that is required of you is to “have ears to hear”—a surrendered disposition to hear what God may have to say to you.

Have you made such a choice with your life? Have you given over all that you are (the good and the bad) and all that you have or ever shall have to God the Father through Jesus Christ? It is this transaction alone by which you enter the Kingdom of God and actually become a Christian. You may have a thousand questions and loads of uncertainty (all of which He will walk you through), but this is where the journey begins.

The second thing required of you is to use your surrendered ears to listen to God's voice in a particular way. Again, Jesus said, *"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear"* (Mark 4:23).

The verb *to hear* that Jesus used is the translation of the Greek word *ακουω*. Similar to the Hebrew *shaMA* (also translated to English as "hear"), it means more than receiving auditory vibrations on your ear drums; it means to *heed*, to attentively listen with the intent to obey.

If your heart's ear has been pierced in devoted love for the Lord, then listen attentively and obey, just as Tim emphasized last week. Hear and do. Listen attentively, in order to learn, and put what you learn into practice.

Apostle James calls all true believers to be *"quick to hear,"* an idiom for having "ears to hear" and using them to "heed" what God says. He admonished us to *"Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves"* (James 1:22).

"Merely hearers" are those who listen but do not follow through with action.

Who would do that? ALL OF US at times. If that sounds like you, know this: it's not a deal-breaker. We're all selfishly human, and our Savior knows it. If we repent, His grace is sufficient to cover us. But don't let it be your habit. That's why Jesus said, "IF you have ears to hear, USE THEM." Don't neglect the opportunity. You've surrendered your heart; also surrender your will, each step of the way. Listen, in order to serve God acceptably.

Unobtrusive

When the Son of God came into our world, He didn't come in a spectacular fashion, as one might expect of a king. He came silently, unobtrusively—in a stable with the livestock, to sleep in a feeding trough, and be greeted by shepherds, Israel's lower class. He came not to the Great City, Jerusalem, where God had set His name and presence, but to an insignificant village, Bethlehem, of the tribe of Benjamin, the youngest of the sons of Jacob.

Jesus' youth has been obscured, without historical record. The son of a builder, of the working class, He had no standing among the religious elite. Even His own family could see nothing special in Him. Yet, He was God in flesh. Listen to Apostle John's reflection:

John 1

¹ *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* ² *He was in the beginning with God.* ³ *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being.* ⁴ *In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind.* ⁵ *And the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not grasp it.*

⁹ *This was the true Light that, coming into the world, enlightens every person.* ¹⁰ *He was in the world, and the world came into being through Him, and yet the world did not know Him.* ¹¹ *He came to His own, and His own people did not accept Him.*

¹⁴ *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

What does this have to do with hearing the voice of God?

The chances are that you have already heard God's voice in this interior way—the "still small voice" or "gentle whisper"—even if you didn't recognize it as God speaking to you.

Jesus, the Living Word, the Word of God made human, came without fanfare, and even those who saw Him didn't immediately recognize Him. His birth and His life were unobtrusive and inconspicuous.

Just so, God's word comes to you most often without fanfare or fireworks. His voice is mostly unobtrusive and inconspicuous, taking the form of thoughts that are your own, though these thoughts are not *from* you. Yet this is the most preferred and most valuable form of God's communication with individuals.

When God's voice first came to young Samuel, who was to become Israel's first and, arguably it's greatest, prophet, he could not recognize the Voice, nor did he even know that such a thing could happen.

Awakened from his sleep, he thought it was the voice of his mentor, Eli the priest, but Eli denied calling him and sent him back to bed. Two more times the Lord called him by name.

"Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. And Eli said to Samuel, 'Go lie down, and it shall be if He calls you, that you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening''" (1 Samuel 3:8-9). Thus began Samuel's divine tutelage as the prophet of Israel.

Don't let the end of Samuel's story frighten you, as though hearing God's voice will require you to confront people's sins and call them to account. Samuel lived in another time and was one-of-a-kind.

I share his awakening to emphasize that God's voice steals into your thoughts and does not force itself to the front of your awareness. Very likely, you have been hearing God's voice already, without recognizing it as something special. No drama. Just a bare whisper.

An Experiment in Listening

Today, we are going to experiment with listening to God speak. You have listened already (I hope) to His words proclaimed in my sermon, but now we are going to use our internal ears to hear the Spirit of Christ speak to our souls—within.

Yours are the faculties of free, intelligent beings involved in the Kingdom of God as His friends and co-laborers. God will not force Himself upon you. You will only hear His voice when you need to, and you will only recognize it if you want to. His voice won't be thundering from the sky above, but He will guide your thoughts, like a whisper, to a point of wonder or discovery or courage or peace.

This exercise is ancient, practiced by many in Christ's church for hundreds of years. It is known in Latin as *Lectio Divina*, or Sacred Reading. It is a way of listening closely, guided by Scripture, to hear what the Spirit would say today. We will take no more than 10 minutes to complete it.

Lectio Divina has four stages:

- Read—*lectio*
- Reflect—*meditatio*
- Respond (Pray)—*oratio*
- Rest (Contemplation)—*contemplatio*

The first stage begins with a slow reading of the Bible passage. Then, you'll read it again, slowly, and invite the Holy Spirit to highlight a word or phrase to you.

The second stage is a third reading of the passage, focusing on the words that stood out to you, and what they might mean for you, asking God to show you how they may apply.

The third stage involves a final reading of the passage, turning what you have heard into a prayer to God, thanking Him or asking Him for something related to what He has sown you.

Finally, just sit in God's presence and contemplate your experience, letting it all settle into your heart and conscience.

Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

Proverbs 20:27; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13, 15-16

To prepare to read in order to receive from God—to hear God—please pause, close your eyes, and breathe out slowly. Ask God to give you an openness to hear whatever the Spirit wishes to bring to you today.

Read—*lectio*

Read to aloud the following passages, slowly.

*The human spirit is like the lamp of the Lord,
searching all his innermost parts. (Proverbs 20:27; New English Translation)*

*“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined
the things that God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

God has revealed those things to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, especially the deep things of God. After all, who knows everything about a person except that person’s own spirit? In the same way, no one has known everything about God except God’s Spirit. Now, we didn’t receive the spirit that belongs to the world. Instead, we received the Spirit who comes from God so that we could know the things which God has freely given us. We don’t speak about these things using teachings that are based on intellectual arguments like people do. Instead, we use the Spirit’s teachings. We explain spiritual things to those who have the Spirit. A person who isn’t spiritual doesn’t accept the teachings of God’s Spirit. He thinks they’re nonsense. He can’t understand them because a person must be spiritual to evaluate them. Spiritual people evaluate everything but are subject to no one’s evaluation.

“Who has known the mind of the Lord so that he can teach Him?”

However, we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:9-13, 15-16; God’s Word)

Now that the words are familiar to you, please read them through again, silently. This time, also *listen with the ear of your heart* for a word or phrase that shimmers or stands out to you. Do not choose this yourself. Let the Spirit bring it to you. Welcome it with meekness and see what happens.

Reflect—*meditatio*

Read the passage a third time, slowly. As you do so, and for a few minutes afterward, *reflect on the word or phrase* that stood out to you. Why do you think these words resonated with you? Give yourself a few minutes to do this.

Then ask God, How does this connect with my life today? What do I need to know or be or do?

Respond (Pray)—*oratio*

Read the passage one last time, preparing yourself for what you want to say to God about what you think the Spirit might have said to you or what came to you.

Pray in whatever way you are led. You might thank God for something or ask God for something.

Rest (Contemplation)—*contemplatio*

Do as you are led. You may wish to make some notes about your experience. You may wish to simply *be with* God, waiting in His presence.

You may wish to ponder, How did God *seem* in the passage? Close or distant? Caring or detached? What about God makes you marvel, or at least want to *be with* him?

Sit in the companionship of God—the One who seeks *you* and is glad to be with you.

Homework!

I invite you to join me in listening to the voice of the Spirit this week, using the *Lectio Divina* method.

I have a packet of five readings prepared for you to use, Monday through Friday. For those who are reading this script, if you would like to participate in the same exercise, send a request for the packet by email to <tcc1675@gmail.com>.

The one thing I will add to what we have done here today is a request that you take a few minutes when you are done with the exercise each day to write down the things you have heard, the things that impressed you, the questions that were raised, and your personal take-away from each day's experience. In order to do this, you will need to extend the time to at least 15 minutes each day—morning, mid-day, or evening.

If you miss a day, do not worry about it—just do as many as you can.

If you would like to share your notes with me, please email a copy to the same address. I will be happy to read them and reply to you.

“If you have ears to hear, listen!”