

Text: 1 Kings 19.1-13
St Stephen's

Jan 21/22, 2012
Weekend Message

The Still, Small Voice of the Lord

We are in a series on "Hearing God" these first two months of the year. During the first weeks we want to set the framework for how we can hear God. To do that, we started with some thoughts about **who God is**. He is the **God Who Speaks**. His voice is a very powerful thing. By his voice **he created** the universe,

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Gen 1.3

Note the underlined word; he created by speaking! And by his voice **he sustains** the universe.

...he upholds the universe by his powerful word.

Hebrews 1. 3

If he stopped speaking, the entire universe would collapse. The Word of God is not just sound waves moving through the air – we are told that the word of God **has creative power**, it is actually **alive**, it is actually a **person**, is actually **God's Son**...

So the bible uses the phrase "**the word of God**" to refer to the creating, sustaining **voice of God**, and to the **Son of God**. Just to keep us back on our heels, the phrase "Word of God" also refers to the written words of God, the book we call '**The Bible**'.

The Word of God is **a very big thing**. It is **no surprise that God speaks** to us! It would be more of surprise if he didn't.

We have also focused on **the reason God speaks** to us. He speaks to us to draw us **into a relationship**, a **partnership**, what turns out to be a **friendship**, that touches every part of our life, and every part of our world, what I called last week "his mend-all, heal-all, make-all-new project".

This weekend we will start to look at some of the details of **How He Speaks To Us**.

Dallas **Willard**, in his book "**Hearing God**", does a survey of Scripture and lists **6 different manners** in which God speaks to us...

- **An Event and a Voice:** think of Moses and the burning bush...
- **Angels:** there are scores of angelic appearances in scripture, from the first pages to the last. The word, 'angel' literally means 'messenger' – almost every angelic appearance involves a message from God.
- **Dreams & Visions:** there is a difference between the two; dreams happen while you are asleep while visions happen while you are awake. There are multiple passages where God used dreams and/or visions to speak with people
- **Audible Voice:** Samuel clearly heard an audible voice that proved to be God's voice when he was a boy. Others have also. (Maybe we wouldn't want God to speak directly to us – note when he spoke to Jesus in John 12, "it thundered"!)

A comment before we go on. **Not every voice**, not every angel, not every dream brings the voice of God. We are fallen people, and that means our hearing and thinking and feeling mechanisms don't work right. They are in the process of being healed, so the bible tells us over and over to '**test all things**', to watch out for spiritual counterfeits. In a couple weeks, we will focus in detail on this issue, but for now a reminder: **check everything against scripture!!** God's personal words to you, no matter how they come, will always match his written words to you.

Back to our list...

- **Human Voice:** There is **no more common way** that God speaks to people in the pages of the Bible. He uses humans to carry his words to other humans. He chooses prophets and kings, he chooses apostles and pastors – and as I say words like that you immediately think, "they are **not like me**", but you would be wrong. There is a distinct pattern of God choosing people exactly like you to speak his

words into the world. Actually it seems as though God has a **preference for people who knew they couldn't speak**, weren't highly educated, knew they weren't accomplished speakers. Think of Moses or Jeremiah or Paul – think of Peter who was always saying the wrong thing. (Rick Warren)

- **"Still, Small Voice"** I want to spend the rest of my time talking to you about this voice today. God can speak to us from **outside** us, and from **inside** us. This is **God's 'inside voice'**; it is very common and very important.

To help us, I want to go back in the pages of scripture to a moment **when God spoke to Elijah.**

Elijah was perhaps the greatest of the prophets of ancient Israel. He lived some 900 years before the birth of Jesus, during **a low point** in Israel's life, when government was corrupt and the faith was corrupt and the heritage of Israel had been long squandered. It seemed like **Elijah alone stood** against his government, against his culture, against the false prophets. It all came to a showdown one famous day on **Mt Carmel** when Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal to **a contest** – they would **each offer sacrifices** to their gods, and the God who **answered by fire** would be the real God. By the end of a very long day, Baal was nowhere to be found, and the God of Israel had answered by fire, perhaps a great lightening strike on a clear day, or something like that, and the prophets of Baal were all dead, and Elijah was a hunted and marked man, **running for his life** from Queen Jezebel.

"Elijah was afraid and ran for his life."

1 Kings 19.3

Don't miss **the irony** of this; Elijah, who has just witnessed one of the most powerful moments of deliverance in Israel's history, is overcome with **fear**. He thinks he's the **only one left** who's faithful, he's **exhausted** and **confused** and **angry**, and he's **running from everyone, from everything.**

The great prophet **can't see God, can't feel him, and can't hear him.**

The first thing God does with him is instructive. He stops him. And he gets him alone...

"Slow Down and Get Alone With God"

"Then Elijah... fell asleep. All at once... the angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat' and he looked around and by his head there was a cake of bread baked and hot coals and a jar of water and he ate it and drank it and he lay down again.

1 Kings 19.5ff

And then the angel did it a **second time**. God's remedy, step one, was to **simply stop**. Rest, eat, rest, eat. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is go to bed! And do it every night. (2005 retreat w D Willard: "Get 10 hours of sleep every night") We live in a world that has **hurry sickness**. We move so fast and carry so much that there is **little space** in our lives pause long enough to even hear what God might say to us. We jam bible reading into a fast-paced day in a fast-paced week, we surround ourselves with noise all the time – how are we supposed to hear the still, small voice of the Lord?

Pastor John **Ortberg** tells the story of his high energy, high success pastorate that had brought him to the place of **burnout (these things all go together)**. He called Dallas Willard for some advice, something like the '**top ten must-do's for rising spiritual giants**'. Dallas listened to him for a bit and was quiet for a bit and then said to him one thing, "**Ruthlessly eliminate hurry**". John said, "*Uh, OK, got that one, what's next?*" There was a pause on the line. Dallas said, "There is **nothing else**, just one thing, 'ruthlessly eliminate hurry.'"

You can't hear God in a hurry. You can't love in a hurry. You can't ponder in a hurry. You can't even sleep in a hurry. **God stopped Elijah**, and then he **got him alone**, 40 days away from everyone and everything, on a mountain and in a cave. So he could talk to him.

Sometimes God will stop you, just to talk to you.

There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

1 Kings 19.9

There's that phrase, "**the word of the Lord came to him.**" God has him alone, and **asks him**, "Why are you here? What are you doing? Where are you going?" **Elijah poured it all out**, all the anger, all the fear, all the frustration, all the exaggeration, all the blame. God just let him pour it all out. And **then God spoke** to him.

"God said, 'Go out and stand in the mountain in the presence of the Lord for I'm about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart... But the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire..."

"Go out and stand in the mountain in the presence of the Lord for I'm about to pass by" - that would put you on edge! **God shook everything** around Elijah with a great wind and an earthquake and a fire. Rocks are splitting apart. The ground is heaving. The mountain is burning... But God's voice was not in all of that...

The Still, Small Voice

And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave."

1 Kings 19.11-13

And just like Moses taking off his sandals, Elijah pulled his cloak over his face and stood before the Lord. He dared not look with his own eyes upon the One who whispered to him.

We think that **God will be found in the power** and the thunder and the fire and the heaving ground under our feet, but often these things come upon us **just to get us to the place where we can finally hear him**, the place where our **world has been shaken** and all **our complaints** have been thrown at God and we are finally at **the end of ourselves** and there is finally room inside us for the real voice of God, the gentle,

clear, 'make all things new' voice of God. I wonder what he whispered to Elijah...

"Elijah, I am the Lord... I reign over heaven and earth... You think you are alone, but my mercy has reached to 1000's of others. And I have upheld them. My mercy shall reach to the ends of the earth before I am through, and it reaches even to you, Elijah. Trust me... Follow me... Do every thing I give you to do..."

"Then the Lord said to Elijah, 'Go back the same way you came.'"

1 Kings 19.15

Maybe Elijah was looking for a **different assignment**, but he didn't get one. What he did get was the still, small voice of God – which made him a **different man**. And back he was sent, back to his world, to his home and his culture and his neighborhood and his workplace, back to his **assignment** in God's "mend-all, heal-all, make-all-new project". But he went back with the voice of the Lord within him.

This is the inner voice of God, given by the **Holy Spirit**, shaped by the **Scriptures**, whispering to you; it is the most common experience you will have of God's guidance.

It is so very important to live a life that **makes room for it**, a 'listening life', an 'attentive life' - to treasure God's voice, and to follow when He speaks to you.

Prayer: "Speak, Lord, for your servants listen"