

Hearing God

Prayer – Talking with God Series

John 16:5-14

Pastor Ryan Harmon

You know, as we were singing that song I thought to myself—because that song is not that old and was written pretty recently—I thought, “You know, I bet there are people in the room who can recall the first time they heard that song and it meant something to them. God spoke in some unusual way that was significant to them, and so that song became one that meant a lot. I think dates are the same way. I’m pretty confident that if I asked anyone in the room to come up with a handful of dates that are significant to them, I bet that you could come up with five, six dates—your birthday I trust. I forgot—true story—my birthday once. Christmas Day—easy—we know that date. Your anniversary, well that gets a little shaky for some of us! Just this past week a lot of people took a day of remembrance to remember that it was D-Day. That’s a day that is historically significant. But of course these dates mean something to people because in some way they’re moments that kind of help define who we are as a people. And, of course, the same can be said for the Christian church throughout.

Throughout history the church has recognized certain days. I already named one of them, Christmas day. Take that day and we think about what that meant was that God became flesh, that God sent His Son. The next date we think about usually kind of falls in that week we call Holy Week. We think of Palm Sunday and Good Friday and Easter—just the incredible moments those were and what it says about God and about us and what those days mean, right? You know, of course, remembering those days or even commemorating them—kind of placing certain significance upon them—there’s no merit in that. We don’t gain anything. God doesn’t give us points in heaven when we think about that kind of stuff. But the reason it’s meaningful to remember those things is because they do help us understand a little bit about who God is and who we are. They define who we are. Christmas Day defines who we are, right? God sent His Son; He loves the world that much!

So what you might not be aware of this morning, unless you’ve been keeping track, is it has been 50 days since Easter. And on the church calendar, 50 days since Easter means today is the day of Pentecost. Today’s the day that we read about in Acts 2—this day where God poured out His Spirit in abundance upon His people. The disciples were in that Upper Room and they were waiting, just as Jesus told them to, and then God poured His Spirit forth; and I think it’s a day worth remembering, particularly as we think about prayer, as we think about hearing from God, because the day that God sent His Spirit is a day that changed the conversation.

So, in order to think about that, we’re going to take a look at that week—Holy Week basically—the couple of days before the crucifixion. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to John, Chapter 16. On that evening that we kind of recognize as the Last Supper, Jesus took time to talk to His disciples about a number of things, and that’s captured in John, Chapters 14 through 17. And during that time Jesus unpacks things that were about to unfold, and He also began to speak to them a number of times during this discourse about the Holy Spirit—the coming of the Holy Spirit and He gave this incredible promise to them. So, we’re going to dive right into the middle of that talk He’s giving them: John, Chapter 16, beginning in verse 5 Jesus says this:

“But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.”

(*NASB, John 16:5-6)

So right away we’re in the middle of this passage and we jump right into this gloomy moment. And if you’re anything like me, sometimes when you read about the disciples’ response to things, you kind of think to yourselves, “What is wrong with these guys? How do they not get it?” But of course we want to be generous to them because this was a somber night and their Lord just told them that He’s leaving. He’s having this very serious talk with them, and they don’t have the benefit that we have of knowing all that’s about to happen. So, they’re right there in this moment and their Lord—the person they’d been with—says, “I’m about to go.” I think it’s pretty safe to say, in fact I hope that if I came to you and I told you that one of your closest friends—a person really significant to you is moving somewhere awful, like Texas or somewhere like that. (*laughter*) If there are any Texans, I’m kidding; it’s not that bad—it would change the tone of the conversation, right? It would be heavy for us. It would weigh heavily on us because significant people leaving our life makes a big difference in our life; it changes our life. And think about what these disciples have been through. For three years they’ve been following Jesus. They’ve been His constant companions, learning from Him, eating with Him, praying with Him, watching Him perform miracles, seeing the conflict that He got into and how He navigated that, because people were against Him. They’d been learning from Him and they’d been rich, rich years, and now they’re having to start to deal with the fact that Jesus is saying, “It’s coming to an end.” They were distraught; they were full of sorrow, and I think that’s completely appropriate. That’s a “*full of sorrow*” kind of thing.

Sometimes I think about the disciples—maybe you have this thought too—and, “Man, it would be so easy if I could just be with Jesus. I’m so envious of those guys that got to walk with Jesus... just be with Him.” How much easier it would be to live the Christian life if I could just have Jesus constantly by my side. When there’s something that’s difficult, I just ask Him. I see how He does everything; I want to copy it because I admire Him so much, and I think, “Man, this would have been so good!” And that’s what they’d been experiencing, and now they are anticipating the end of that moment, and that’s what makes what Jesus says next so surprising. In the anticipation of that moment, He says this to them in verse 7:

“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.”

Boy, every time I read that verse, I do a doubletake: **It’s to your advantage that I go away!** I’m pretty willing to bet that is no one’s life verse, right? We don’t stencil that one, put it above the family dinner table, but Jesus said it to His disciples and if He said it to His disciples, then He intends it for us as well. And He’s saying, “It’s better that I go because then I will send the Spirit to you.” He calls Him **the Helper**. Your translation might say *the Advocate* or *the Counselor*. And having the Counselor *is better* than having Jesus in the flesh...better than having Jesus in the flesh? Now that’s an extraordinary statement! Now, what Jesus says is true; He never says things just because they sound nice. He always means what He says, so whatever we believe about the Holy Spirit, we must believe that He must be pretty incredible because Jesus has told us “*It’s better that He come than that He (Jesus) remain with the disciples.*”

So let’s talk about the Holy Spirit for a few minutes. You see, in this church we believe that God is three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—and that God is One—He is unified. The Spirit is a person; He’s not some kind of force like Star Wars, or something that God kind of sends out or

you can tap into, something like that. The Spirit is a person; and we see the Spirit work throughout Scripture in the Old and the New Testaments. In the Old Testament, I like to think of it as the Spirit kind of *falls* or *comes upon* certain people at certain times for particular or certain reasons. So, we think about how His Spirit falls on His leaders; let's say the leaders of Israel, or to lead Israel in the way that God wants them to go. I sometimes think that in the Old Testament it is almost as if the Spirit had really precise aim, and it's like God says, "Okay, now My Spirit is going to go on that person, for this thing," and we think about people like Moses, like David, and like Elijah—God's Spirit falling on particular people for particular purposes.

There's a story I love in the Old Testament. It's in Numbers 11 and I'm just going to tell it to you really quickly. But it's as Israel is moving through the wilderness, and it's getting kind of bad. They're starting to complain a lot; they're starting to whine a lot; they're bickering; there are conflicts between them, and Moses—to sum it up—is fed up; he's had enough! And he comes to the point that he actually prays this to God, "God, just kill me now!" That's an honest prayer isn't it? You know my wife and I just drove from Atlanta to Lincoln with my three kids (*laughter*)...it was only 17 hours! Moses is in the wilderness for years and years with this group of people and there weren't iPads, right? I mean, my kids can be entertained. So God says this to Moses, "You know what? You're right; this is pretty tough. Here's what I'm going to do, Moses. I want you to gather 70 men from among the elders and I want you to bring them to the tabernacle and I'm going to take the Spirit that I have on you and I'm going to put it on them so that they can help you as you are trying to lead these people and govern them." So that's just what Moses does. He gathers 70 men from among the elders; they come into the tabernacle, and as they are in the tabernacle, God does just what He says He's going to do: He takes His Spirit, puts some of His Spirit on these 70 leaders; and they begin to prophesy and do things that we read in Scripture that sometime happened when the Spirit is doing a new thing. But this crazy thing happens! At the same time there were two men outside still with the people. They didn't get invited or something like that; we don't know why but all we do know is that the Spirit fell on those two people as well. So you've got the 70 with the Spirit now, and you've got these two guys out in the camp getting the Spirit and Joshua (Moses' young protégé) is a little bit concerned about this. He runs to Moses and he says, "Moses, make them stop...make them stop. This isn't right!" And listen to what Moses says, "**Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them.**" In other words, "*Joshua, here's what I wish: I wish God would pour His Spirit out on all of His people. It would be so much better than what we have right now.*"

In the Old Testament we see the Spirit move in precise ways and in particular ways, falling on particular people for a specific purpose. But beginning in that wilderness with Moses, this wish kind of grew throughout the Old Testament—that God would pour His Spirit out in abundance; and it kind of comes to the point where in the Prophets it's prophesied that God's going to do that. And then we get to Jesus and Jesus knows that that's about to happen and that's why He can say with such confidence, "*It's to your advantage that I go away, because I will send the Helper to you, and that's better.*" So when the Spirit comes, what will He do? Well, continue with me in verse 8:

"And He, when He comes (when the Spirit comes), He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged." (Vs. 8-11)

Well, there's a lot that we can say about those verses, but what I want to emphasize is that what Jesus is saying is that, "*When I leave, the Spirit will come and He will continue to do that which I*

have been doing.” When Jesus was kind of engaging in His ministry, we certainly would say that part of what He did was convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. We talked a few weeks ago about being light in darkness, and how light shines into darkness, exposes deeds of darkness—and we can certainly say that’s what Jesus did. And Jesus is saying, *“There’s going to be continuity when the Spirit comes, He’s going to continue to do what I have been doing.”* Continuing in verse 12:

“I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.” (Vs. 12-14)

Wow, I read that, and like whoa...wait a second, “Jesus, I have many more things to say to You!” That’s where I want to say, “I always wish Peter would have kind of butted in like he always tended to do and like, ‘Hey, take your time. I want to hear it. We want to hear the many more things that You have to say.’” But Jesus knew He didn’t have time, did He? That Last Supper, of course, is the evening that He’s arrested. That’s coming very quickly. Another thing is that Jesus is aware that His disciples were distraught; they were full of sorrow. They didn’t have the emotional, mental capacity in that moment to hear what He wanted to tell them. I’m so thankful Jesus didn’t say at that moment what I’d be tempted to say, “Hey, can you guys just pull it together for a moment so I can tell you some of the stuff that I was going to say?” But Jesus acts like a person that’s got all the time in the world, and I think it’s because it’s exactly what He knew He had. He has all the time in the world because He tells us that when the Spirit is going to come, the Spirit is going to fill in the blanks. “The Spirit is going to continue to say what I have been saying to you, what I want to continue to say to you.” You see the Spirit will pick up right where Jesus left off with His disciples. So what we can say is that Jesus is still speaking through His Spirit to His people; and the question that we want to consider with what time we have left today is, “Are we listening...are we listening?”

Last week as Mark unpacked a broad overview of prayer, he talked about how prayer is our talking with God about what we’re doing together, right? That preposition is really important. We want to make sure it’s “talking *with God*” not “talking *at God*”, not “talking *to God*”. We want this to be a conversation. We want to develop an interactive relationship with God. This isn’t a monologue when we go to prayer. We want to be people that have conversations *with God*. And Jesus tells us clearly, “The Spirit is going to speak; the Spirit is speaking.” So, are we listening?

Let’s talk for a moment about the place that the Spirit speaks most clearly. All of you are holding it in your hands right now. Not your phone. The Bible that you’re looking at—maybe on your phone! Alright, the Spirit clearly speaks through the Scriptures. See, we’re so blessed to be in a church that values the Scriptures, that places high importance on the Scriptures, that we want to come each week; we want to unpack the Scriptures. Why do we do that? Because we believe that the Scripture is God speaking to us, is communicating specifically to us. He’s explaining who He is, how He works, who we are because of who He is. That’s why it’s so important that we meditate on it, that we dig into it, that we ask questions, that we know it. We want to be people that are immersed in the Scriptures.

But I still want to ask this question: “As we read, are we listening?” I was a communication major in college. Last night someone had the audacity to come to me and say, “Communication major? That’s kind of like underwater basket weaving, right?” I said, “Hey, easy.” (*laughter*) I was a

communications major and one of the classes I took was called *Interpersonal Communication* and in this class we were told we wanted to analyze the way that we communicate—and so I did just that. I said, “You know I want to look at how I do as a listener.” So, I started reading about different types of listening and that kind of thing. And as I was reading, I realized there’s a couple of things that I do with quite a bit of regularity. The first one is called pseudo-listening. Pseudo-listening is when you give all the non-verbal cues that you’re listening, but you’re really paying no attention whatsoever. You’re thinking about the Husker game or what you need to do next. You’re thinking about something else. Some of you might be doing it right now! Right? (*laughter*) You know, you kind of “Hum, yeah, um, oh yeah”; you can kind of let people think that you are listening. It’s really a horrible thing to do. But I did it—pseudo listening.

The second thing was ambushing. Ambushing is different. When you ambush, what you’re doing is you’re paying really close attention to what someone is saying so that you can pounce and take advantage of something they said wrong. That’s ambushing. So, you can imagine I was really a joy to be around during this time in my life. I ambushed and I pseudo-listened. Well, if it wasn’t humbling enough to realize that I do that in my interpersonal relationships, you could imagine the horror that I felt when I opened my Bible and I looked at my notes and I realized I was doing the same, exact thing. You know, when God is a person (I know, we say that all the time) and so of course I’m going to communicate with Him in the manner that I communicate with people. I’m sure that you’ve done this before, right? You read an entire chapter and you think, “I don’t remember a single word I just read.” That’s pseudo-listening. But even worse I was ambushing. There was one note in my margin, and I’m not exaggerating. In big, bold letters with two exclamation points it said, “TELL DAVE THIS!!” with an arrow to some verse. How horrible is that? Ambushing Dave as I’m listening to God speak. As we read, are we listening?

Let me give you one little suggestion this week: Whatever kind of plan you have for engaging with Scripture, keep doing that, but maybe also this week try to memorize one or two verses and during one of your days, just kind of maybe reflect on that verse throughout your day. Just chew on it; meditate on it. Because what Jesus tells us the Spirit is going to do is, He’s going to reveal truth to us as we are engaging in God’s word. Are we listening?

Here’s a slight adjustment to the question: Are we taking the time to listen? Sometimes when I read old theology books or I listen to old sermons, some of these old preachers will say things like, “God is a gentleman.” These are things you don’t hear very often anymore; but what they mean by that is that God has manners. He’s polite. He doesn’t barge into conversations where He’s not wanted. One guy I was listening to said, “God wants to be wanted, not that He *needs* to be wanted but He wants to be wanted. He’s a person. People typically don’t want to be where they’re not wanted. Are we setting aside time to let God know we want Him there?

Since I’ve kind of been using all of my horrible habits as examples, I’m going to continue that. I’m going to tell you about one thing that happens fairly frequently in my house. We’ll get the kids to bed; I’ll grab a Coke or something. We’ll put on a series on Netflix or we’ll watch a movie, turn on a sporting event or something and I’m thinking, “Life is good!” Like the chaos has subdued and I’m settling in. And it’s right around that moment—I want you to have a full kind of grasp of the picture, right? My wife’s sitting right next to me on the couch; it’s usually right around that moment that she’ll turn to me and she’ll say, “I miss you...I miss you.” Some of you I think probably have heard this before. If you could get a picture of my face in that moment, you’d see the most confused person on earth. Right? I’m like, “I’m right here!” But of course what Janee/ wants isn’t my physical presence with her; she wants my attention. What she’s saying is, “I want to talk with you. I want to see that you’re interested in me. I want to have a conversation with you. It’s not

enough that we're sitting side by side; I want to talk and engage with you." And so, if I were smart, which some of the time, I am, I plan a date, or I turn the TV off. But we set aside time to give attention to one another.

So, the question is, "Is it really all that different with God? You know, I can look at God and I can say "Hey, listen, You're everywhere, and You can say whatever You want, and You can speak it as loud as You want, so just do that whenever You're ready." Alright, I can say that to Him, but it misses the point that, as I align my life in such a way to set aside time dedicated to God, it communicates, "I want to hear from You!" God wants to be in places where He's wanted. He's quick to come to those places.

So, this week, what are some practical things that we can do to set aside time? Mark told us last week that he mows his lawn but my lawn is really small. So God's going to have to be really concise if He's going to speak to me in that moment. But you know what I find sometimes? It's like: turn off my radio in my car as I'm driving around, choosing not to put on music, not to put on talk radio, something like that. Just choosing to be quiet and to say in my heart, even say out loud, "Spirit, I am here, say what You will; I'm listening. I want to hear from You!"

Now during these weeks, we're trying to be really practical, so I want to close with maybe some answers to a question that possibly you're asking. See, I know for me that one of the things that I struggle with is, "When the Spirit speaks, how will I know?" Because I know there are a lot of things that go through my head that aren't from God. I can't just assume everything I hear, or I think is from God. So, what are some markers that would tell me that God is saying something? I want to talk about that for a few minutes—ways to differentiate between maybe something that I'm thinking and something that maybe God is saying.

Before I do that, I want to give one quick caveat. It could be that you are here this morning and it's possible that you've never surrendered your life to Jesus. So, the thing I want to say really clearly is that the promise of the Spirit is a promise for those who have placed their faith and their confidence in Jesus—and that today could be the day that this promise of the Spirit comes into your life, right? This could be the moment that you have here this morning, but it comes through placing your faith and your confidence in Jesus. You see, the promise of the Spirit is for God's people, God's people who have placed their life, their trust, and their faith in Jesus.

But how will we know when the Spirit speaks? Here are a few guidelines. Here is the first one: When the Spirit speaks, He will always speak in agreement with Scripture. That's why it's so important that we know our Bibles, so important that we start to hear God's voice in Scripture, so important that we engage in Scripture and start to understand just the way God speaks and who He is, the character of His speaking. As my ears become attuned to His Word, my ears can become almost quickened so that I can recognize God's speaking to me when I am praying, when I am alone, when I am silent. Sometimes I've thought, "Well, of course I want to hear if God spoke, that I would understand it." But I'm not so sure.

I think about that story in the Old Testament of Samuel and Eli. You remember that story? Little boy Samuel goes into the temple and Eli is the one that's kind of bringing him up in the ways of the Lord. And God calls Samuel at night; Samuel does not know who it is, doesn't recognize the voice. So Samuel goes and tells Eli, and Eli doesn't understand what's happening. Finally, after a couple of tries, Eli figures out God is speaking so he tells Samuel, "When He speaks, tell him, 'Your servant is listening.'" We shouldn't automatically assume that I would always hear God's voice when He speaks, but that's one thing that I want to do when I engage in Scripture. I just want to

start to understand and get acquainted with the way that God speaks—who He is, what He sounds like. That’s the first principle. When the Spirit speaks, He will always speak in agreement with the Scriptures.

The second one is when the Spirit speaks, it will sound an awful lot like Jesus, and it will bring glory to Jesus. You see, the disciples were so ready to receive the Spirit because they had just spent all this time being the familiar, constant friends of Jesus, and so they were ready to be the familiar, constant friends of the Spirit. So, when the Spirit speaks, it will have the tone of Jesus’ voice so to speak, the manner of Jesus about it. It will sound an awful lot; it will look an awful lot; it will feel an awful lot like Jesus speaking, right? Because God is One. If you want to know what the Spirit is like, who shall we look at? Look at Jesus! If we want to know what the Father is like, what shall we do, where shall we look? We look at Jesus! When the Spirit speaks, it will sound an awful lot like Jesus. It will have the tone and the tenor of Jesus. What was He like? Well, He certainly came and convicted the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment but He also was love incarnate. He also was peace. He spoke strength; He spoke truth; He was an encourager. When the Spirit speaks, it will sound like Jesus.

The last principle—this one is a little more abstract—but when the Spirit speaks, it unfortunately will not always come in the form of like big thunder clouds and earthquakes and lightening. Don’t we wish that would happen? If you have ever been facing a really big moment, you’re like, “Man, God, if you could just make those clouds form into the word of the place that I’m supposed to go.” We think that way, don’t we, but that’s not generally how God speaks. The Spirit, when He speaks, will sound an awful lot like what is described in 1 Kings. In that story in 1 Kings 19, Elijah is waiting to hear from God and a big earthquake comes, and this torrent comes and these thunderclouds come, and God is not in any of those. But then it says there’s a *low whisper*. Other translations say a *still small voice*, a thin voice, and Elijah knew that was God. And what do we say about a low whisper? Well, a low whisper has to be right. I have to pay attention to it; I have to attune my ears to it. Typically, when the Spirit speaks, it will be in this low whisper. But what’s the quality of the whisper? It’s a low whisper that has the weight of God behind it. It’s a low whisper that I sometimes think weighs heavily on me. I can’t ignore it. My thoughts I can ignore but not this. It bares weight. It’s different. It’s a normal word but with particular weight, with gravity to it. It sounds different because it’s not from me; it’s from God. When the Spirit speaks, He will speak in a low whisper. He wants us to pay attention. It will be a normal word typically, but it will be a word that we can’t ignore. It will burn inside of us. We will have to respond. Church, the Spirit is speaking, and Jesus promised us the Spirit will come. The Spirit has come, and this is a day to remember because God poured forth His Spirit in a flood...in abundance. No longer is it the kind of thing where God’s Spirit moves there or here. God pours out His Spirit, and we are the people that have the Spirit among us, but also the Spirit in us, leading us into truth. And we want to be a people today, this week, that are listening.

And as we close, I want to make one more point. I want to encourage you with this, because if you are anything like me when the topic of prayer comes up—maybe even when Mark introduced it last week—you thought, “Oh great!” If you went and looked at my journals from 20 years ago, and when I said this last hour, I thought, “How am I old enough to have written in a journal 20 years ago, but I am.” But I guarantee you 20 years ago what it would say is, “Lord, I want to grow in my prayer life. I just wish my life of prayer were further along than it is.” So, I know that this is a topic that often gives feelings of guilt—and that is not what Mark or I want. We want to set the table; we want to stir up a desire to have God’s Spirit speak. It is such a privilege and we just want to grow in it and God is patient with us.

But I wanted to tell you a little bit about what the Spirit is doing right now as we close. If you ever wonder what the Spirit is doing, Paul tells us right here in Romans 8:26: Let me read this verse to you as we finish. Paul says: **In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;**

What is the Spirit doing right now? He's praying for you. The Spirit's interceding for you on your behalf, and the Spirit knows the beginning from the end because the Spirit is God Almighty. He knows exactly what each one of us is going to encounter today...what we are going to encounter tomorrow...and what we're going to encounter next year. He knows the strength that we need to experience those things and He knows precisely how to pray for those things—and that's what the Spirit is doing. What a glorious hope that should give us! Church, we've been given the Spirit; let's be people that listen. But let's also praise God that in giving of His Spirit, we have an intercessor that is praying for us. Will you join me as we thank God for that?

Our Father, we thank You so much that You have given us Your Spirit. You poured it forth in such generosity; we praise You for that. And we pray that You would make us a people that are listening, that You'd attune our ears to Your very words, and that we become a people marked by listening to You and responding for Your name's sake and for Your glory, Amen.

Taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2019 – Ryan Harmon. All rights reserved.