

Hearing the Voice of God

Introductory Message - Pastor Roger Ridley

Gretna Baptist Church, Gretna, NE, September 25, 2005

I was at a Christian Bookstore, looking through a container of discounted cassette tapes. While looking through it I found one that seemed interesting, and since it was only \$1.00, I bought it. It was money well spent. (Tony Elenburg, Compassionate Heart, Milk & Honey Records)

There was especially one song that touched my heart entitled, *I Need To Hear My Father's Voice*. Hearing that song prompted me to search the Scriptures and see just what it teaches about the voice of God. Quite frankly, I was surprised. Maybe I shouldn't have been, but I was nonetheless, to find so many references to God's voice. I counted 183 specific, direct references to the voice of God, given in a variety of circumstances. Through them all, one thing is clear: Our Heavenly Father Wants Us To Hear His Voice!

In today's message, I want to introduce this subject to you and how it is intended to touch our lives. Then, in the weeks to follow, I want us to consider some of the specific circumstances in which God's voice was heard.

As an introduction, I want to answer **three questions**: What is the voice of God like? How does God speak to me? And, What is the expectation of God's voice?

I. What Is The Voice Of God Like?

Concerning the first question, *What is the voice of God like?*, I have a tremendous feeling of inadequacy, both in my ability to understand it, and in my ability to describe it. My impression is that those recorded in the Bible, as examples for us, had the same sense of inadequacy:

(1) Standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai, when the people of Israel heard the voice of God, they quickly moved away from the mountain for fear, and asked that God not speak again to them lest they die. (Exodus 20:18-19)

(2) When Ezekiel heard the voice of the Almighty, he fell on his face. (Ezekiel 1:28)

(3) When Daniel heard the voice of the Lord, he fell down, and every time he tried to stand back up, he fell down again. He had no strength in his legs. And when he did finally stand, he couldn't stop his legs from shaking out of fear. (Daniel 10:7-11)

(4) In Revelation chapter 1, when the apostle John heard the voice of the Lord, he fell to the ground as a dead man. (Revelation 1:17)

All of these men were overwhelmed by the voice of God, and so, where do we even begin to describe it?

What I have decided to do is just share with you a few of the references to God's voice:

(1) In Job 37:4-5 it says that the voice of God *roars*. That He *thunders* with the voice of His excellency. That He thundered *marvelously* with His voice.

(2) Look with me at Psalm 29...

(3) Isaiah, in Isaiah 30:30 calls God's voice a *glorious* voice.

(4) Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 10:13 says that when He utters His voice that it is like a multitude of waters. Ezekiel and the apostle John give this same description. It is a reference to the sound of many water falls. Have you ever been near just one? Just one is loud and overwhelming. Think of a multitude! (Ezekiel 43:2; Revelation 1:15)

(5) Daniel said that it was like a man's voice, and then he says that it was like a whole multitude of people. (Daniel 8:15-17)

(6) Joel and Amos both said that the Lord *roared* with His voice. (Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2)

(7) On numerous occasions God's voice is said to thunder and is described as a loud voice. And yet, God spoke with Moses and Job as a friend speaks with a friend. (Exodus 33:11; Job 29:4)

(8) To Elijah it was a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:12)

(9) Solomon said that it was *sweet* to hear. (Song of Solomon 2:14)

(10) The Gospels record the voice of the Father speaking of Jesus, "*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.*" The voice of a loving Father. (Matthew 3:17; 17:5)

With all of these references in mind, how do we describe the voice of God?

Well first of all, we would have to say that it is *beyond* description, because it is the voice of *the Almighty*. As it says in Job 40:9, "*No one can thunder like Him.*"

Second, His voice seems to be sensitive to the need of the moment and the person. Sometimes He thunders and roars. Sometimes He speaks softly and tenderly.

Third, In every single reference, when God spoke, the person could distinguish between the voice of God and all other voices imaginable. And so, apparently, God's voice is so unique that when you hear it, you know it!

And then finally, it is obvious that God speaks to be heard. He wants us to hear His voice.

II. How Does God Speak To Me?

That brings us to the second question that, I think, probably has already been in your heart and on your mind. *How does God speak to me?*

For a teacher/preacher, this is an intimidating question, because the answer is so important. I better be right in what I say because God will hold me accountable. Not only for teaching something that might be wrong, but also for how it would effect you. (James 3:1)

Does God speak to us today with a man's voice? Like He did with Moses or any of the other prophets? I have heard some professing Christians say that He does. Certainly, those identified as Christian cult leaders have said that He does.

When I first became a Christian, over 30 years ago, in the area that I lived, Victor Paul Wierville of a group called the Way International had a lot of influence on college students. He said that while driving on a bright, warm, summer day, he suddenly found himself in a snowstorm, and heard a voice, the voice of God speaking to him audibly as any man speaks to a man. (The Way, Elena Whiteside, American Christian Press, New Knoxville, OH, 1972)

Does God really do that?

First of all, I will not entirely discount the possibility. God is God and He can do whatever He wants to do. If He wants to speak to us with an audible voice He certainly can.

In the future, I expect to hear His voice. I hope to hear Him say, "*Well done thou good and faithful servant.*" Through my adult life, as a Christian, that's what I have lived for.

But we also need to understand something about the possibility of hearing the audible voice of God: It is not likely.

I say that because, even in the Old Testament, where we find numerous references to the audible voice of God, it was still uncommon. It was still out of the ordinary and limited to just a few. Almost exclusively, with only a very few exceptions, only the prophets claimed to have heard God's voice.

In the New Testament, aside from the Father's affirmation of His Son, hearing the voice of God was seemingly limited to Paul, Peter, and John.

So, hearing the audible voice of God has never been the common experience of His people. Even with those that He spoke with, the Scriptures indicate that they were very surprised. They did not expect it. It was not common to their time.

However, many still claim to hear God's voice audibly. Recently here in Lincoln, Nebraska, a young man was on trial for intending to blow up the high school he attended. The state appointed psychologist testified that the young man believed he was following the voice of God to expose the evils of Satanism at the school (Lincoln Journal Star, August 23, 2005, front page).

What do we do with such claims?

The Bible is very clear, going all the way back through the Old Testament. We are to never take it for granted that people with such claims are telling the truth. They might be deceived. Perhaps a lying spirit spoke to them. Or maybe all they heard was the vain imaginations of their own heart. 1 John 4:1 says, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*"

Victor Paul Wierville, of my college days, was a false prophet because the things that he heard and taught did not agree with the Word of God.

More recently, Betty Eadie, of *Embraced by the Light* fame (Bantam Books 1994) was also a false prophet. She claimed to have died, gone to heaven, and talked with God. Then she was sent back by Him to give us the truth. Whether deceived by a demon, or deceived by her own heart, one thing is certain, she never talked with God. The things she taught did not agree with God's Word.

If you and I should not expect to hear God's audible voice, then how does He speak to us today? Look with me at Hebrews 1:1-3...

Just as God spoke in a variety of ways in the Old Testament, primarily to the prophets, in these last days, the days in which you and I still live, He has spoken through His Son, Jesus Christ.

An interesting thing though is revealed in verse 3. Jesus has said what He needed to say. He has done what He needed to do. And so, He is finished for now, and sits at the right hand of the Father.

Here's what He did for us though:

John 1:14, says that even though no one has ever seen God, Jesus as God in flesh has made God known to us as none other could.

By going to the cross, according to John 14, He prepared the way that you and I, by faith in Him, might have a personal relationship with the Father.

And according to Hebrews 4:16, He made it possible for us to enter, by prayer, into the presence of God boldly at any time when we are in need.

And so, first of all, we must understand that in order to speak with God and to hear the voice of God today, it must be through His Son. Have you received Jesus Christ by faith making such a relationship possible?

Second, God speaks to us by His Spirit. Romans 8:16 says that the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit. Look also at 1 Corinthians 2:9-12...

Clearly, God speaks to our spirit by the Spirit of God. This is in keeping with the promise Jesus made. That when He would depart, He would send another Helper, the Holy Spirit. John 14:26 - to teach us all things. John 16:13 - to guide us into all truth. Each of us, at

the moment of our salvation, received the Spirit of God. Not only that we might have the power of God in our life. But also that we might have the voice of God in our life.

And then third, God speaks to us by His Written Word, the Scriptures. David speaks in Psalm 103:20 of "*hearing the voice of God's Word.*"

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*"

Everything that we need to know, and everything that God wants us to know is recorded in His Written Word. According to Revelation 22:19, nothing is to be taken from it or added to it. It is complete. It is what the Holy Spirit uses to teach us and to guide us.

Now, maybe you feel cheated that God speaks to us today differently than in times past. Maybe you want to hear *the thunder*. Maybe you want to hear the voice of *many waters*. I can understand that. But keep in mind that most of those who did hear it did not want to. And even though we live in an age that craves dramatic experiences, what we have is better. Moses, Abraham, David, and Daniel all looked forward to our day. The voice of God is more widely available and understandable in our time than it has ever been before because of the combination of the Savior, the Spirit, and the Scriptures.

III. What Is The Expectation Of God's Voice?

Well, if God's voice is so available, why do we so long to hear His voice, as if He's got nothing to say? I hope to deal adequately with that in our final question. *What is the expectation of God's voice?*

Of this there is no doubt, God wants us to hear His voice and has done everything possible for us to hear His voice in order that we might walk and talk with Him. That is the expectation of His voice. You go back to Genesis 3:10 and you find out that Adam and Eve used to walk and talk with God in the garden. Sin destroyed that. The rest of the Bible explains what God has done to make it possible again.

1 John 1:7 says, "*If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*"

If I counted right, I found 88 instances in the Bible where the voice of God is directly linked with obedience, and our ability to fellowship with Him. Meaning that's so important that nearly half of all the references to God's voice in the Scriptures centers around this expectation: God desires us to walk and talk with Him.

But there's a problem. *We often choose not to.* Of those instances, 32 speak of deliberate disobedience to the voice of God.

Why do we sometimes fail to hear God's voice? Based on the references that I've mentioned, allow me to quickly summarize four reasons:

1. Satan does everything he can to keep us from hearing.

2. We allow the cares and voices of this world to crowd out God's voice.

3. Unbelief. We often question that God says what He says.

4. (And I believe this is the biggest reason.) We choose not to hear. We don't want to obey God. We don't want to be accountable to Him. We don't want to hear what He has to say. We want to do things *our own way*.

Conclusion: Where then does all of this leave us? Look with me at Hebrews 12:18-25...

In the past, others chose not to listen to the voice of God. They were severely punished. In the present, God has made it easier and better for us to hear. And so He says, "*See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.*"

Hebrews 3:15 and 4:7 say, "*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.*" That only brings separation, silence, and severity, when He's got something far better in mind.

Revelation 3:20 says, "*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*"

If it's true that we need, and that we desire to hear the Father's voice. He's available, and wants to talk with each of us intimately.

That encourages me. I hope, it encourages you too.