

Connecting With God

Listening

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Read Psalm 19: 1-14

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ² Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. ³ There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. ⁴ Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, ⁵ which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. ⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat. ⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. ¹⁰ They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. ¹¹ By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴ May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

These past few weeks we have been engaged in the midst of a sermon series entitled “**Connecting with God.**” We have touched on how God speaks to us through Prayer, Communion, worshipping God, and today how we are to listen.

How do we listen? How do you listen? I can imagine some of those conversations, "Billy Bob, Billy Bob, are you listening to me?" "Yes dear?" "Well what did I say?" And the deadly phrase of ...”uhhh”, followed by the retort, “You NEVER listen to me.”

Hear are some phrases that elicit, or not, an attitude of listening.

“Alright people, listen up.” A coach telling his team to pay attention.
(In a whisper) “Listen, do you hear that? ...What is that noise?” a frightened kid camping in a tent.
“Will you **please** listen to me?” A person trying to reason with another

How do we listen? With open minds, open hearts, open ears? When we listen to the Word of God, there are three things that we need to know about listening.

1st: We need a word from God.**2nd:** Why we need it. **3rd:** How to receive God’s word

1. We need a Word from God.

We need real, literal words from God. Psalm 19: 1-6, tells us about the natural order of stars, moon, and planets. That tells us something about the Creator God. Each of us can receive insight from God about the created order through nature. “The heavens declare, the skies proclaim.” You live in West Texas, you have all seen and heard the skies PROCLAIM during stormy weather in the crack of lightning, the howl of the wind, the deep rumbling peals of awesome thunder. The dusty unique red muddy rain splatting on the window. Verse three tells us that “There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.” Nowhere is their silence. The skies and heavens declare on behalf of God.

The message of the 19th Psalm, tells us about the world and the created natural order. And when we are in the discovery mode on our own, we can learn about God. But that self awareness of God's presence, it is not enough.

Look at verses 1- 4. There are words there that tell us something, but not with specifics. This language is intuitive, something you sense, something you know without being spoken to about whatever the specific is. There is information here, but it is non verbal.

How do you communicate without words? People who are hearing impaired can often read lips or use sign language. If you have been in a foreign country unable to speak the native language, you may resort to hand gestures, or my favorite, speaking in your native tongue, VERY LOUDLY! That doesn't make the person understand you any better, although you can look a bit ridiculous. Nature does not give us words about God. For example if you are in the woods, how do you leave a message to someone that says, go 3 miles and take a left at the creek. Meet me at the low water crossing. Do you leave a rock tower, a broken branch, an arrow etched into the trail of the path? It would be better to leave a note if you could.

You see, we need words to be specific. The Book of Romans in chapter 1 tells us that the world of nature can infer, impart, and even cause us to intuit an awareness of God's creation, but we still need the words. Nature's message can be easily misinterpreted. For example do you see a lovely star in the night sky, or a blob of burning gas?

Psalm 19 means, nature is great, God is glorious, but people of God, we still need words.

The smallest verse in scripture is more nourishing than all the honey in the world. Nature itself can't save or revive the souls, so we need sound. Which brings us to "why we need a Word from God?"

2. Why do we need a Word from God?

We can't know the love of God in general and not know the grace of God in particular.

We can't know the love of God in general, and not know the love of God in particular.

Verses. 1-6 mention God. In verse 7 we speak of scripture, and then shift to speaking of the Lord. YHWH. YHWH is the personal name of God, the covenant name of God. LORD is the personal name of God.

So Ps. 19 says in essence, "I want to know about God and to look at nature, but I want you to know about the God who loves you. So look in scripture."

People have told me that they don't believe in a God of the Bible, that they only believe in the God of love. They reject the Bible. Hmm. Know anyone like that?

As you speak to the Bible rejecter, you might say, "You say God is a God of love, where did you see that?" They might say "In nature." So I say, "Have you looked at volcanoes, tsunamis, avalanches?" Ever watched Animal Planet and see a lion take down a zebra? Did you look at natural selection and see how the weakest or injured animal is the first to die in nature?

They might say, "Well I get 'God is love from history'." Well then really read history instead of the Bible. Read any history book and you confront war, murder, invasions, avarice, greed, backstabbing, pestilence, cruelty, injustice. Where is the God of love in history? Some folks may say, "Well I believe in the God of love in other religions." Oh really? The other religions believe that God is a god of love? Well, so often the main message of other religions is about reincarnation, doing good works, or protecting oneself. The God of the Old and New Testament is about a love relationship with His people. It's about covenant, about protection, about sacrifice, about sending a son to die for

because God loved each one of you in your brokenness, in your bad habits, in your shortcomings, in our sin. God the creator loves us so much that all he wants is to have you be in a loving relationship with Him. The creator of the universe. God is not a cosmic enforcer.

You might say to the one who rejects a God of love out of the Bible, “The idea of a great God loving comes into being through the Bible. It’s ironic that you don’t believe the Bible, and say God is love.” Friends, only in scripture do we find that God loves us. Not through nature, not through history, not through other religions. It comes through the Bible. The OT and the NT.

Listen to verse 7 which says, “The law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul.” Your soul is your essence; it is your heart, your nature. And “**Revive**” means that it, your soul, is in need of restoration.

Our souls need to be repaired, revived, and restored. We can easily get crushed by the troubles of the world, and our own brokenness, and sinful nature.

The only thing that restores the soul, yours and mine, is our knowledge that God loves me. Me. That He will restore me. Scriptures words tell us that. Tell me that.

How is it possible for King David to write the Psalms and say that the Law is wonderful and great? Does the Law restore David? “May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord my rock, and my redeemer. “ The very words of my mouth, what I say, what I send out, and the inner meditations of my heart, the inner depth and prayer and praise and cries from deep within me that are instilled and inspired by the Holy Spirit. That means both inside and outside.

God’s law is perfect because we know that God will be pleased with me when I offer myself to him. I can’t be good enough, pure enough, but I can be forgiven.

God sets us free to choose to love Him and when we cry out to him, He restores us. The Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ do the will of God on our behalf. Christ obeys God’s law perfectly, for us, on our behalf. Because we can’t be perfect.

You see, Christ redeems us before God for our inability to keep the law perfectly. Jesus takes the curse of the law as stated in Galatians 3:10, “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”

Ever tried to write down how to tie a shoelace, or better yet, to tie a neck tie. It is next to impossible. I can read how to tie the tie, but I want and need someone to tell me, to show me, how to do it. I need words that guide me. Don’t leave it to my imagination or intuition, “Lord speak to me through your word. Let me hear and listen.”

We need the Gospel because we are saved not by what we do, but by what Jesus did for us. Jesus Christ has done everything necessary for your salvation. Jesus did anything and everything for you, so you might live a life of grace, a life of being forgiven and restored, and the knowledge of your salvation.

How do you know God loves you? By hearing the words from pastors, preacher’s teachers, prophets and friends. And also by reading and hearing the scriptures read, and spoken about Christ.

Matthew 4:4 says, Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

The end of the Psalm 19: 11-14 tells us about searching.

3. How do we receive a Word from God?

When you hear the word preached and read at any time, do these two things:

1. Examine your heart with the sermon if you want to hear the sermon message.
2. Examine what the scripture say to you.

Typically people sit in judgment on the preacher. They say, "He is too long winded; he or she used a bad illustration." Maybe you compare them to a person you know. Maybe you don't trust their politics, or hate his coat and tie combination. Maybe you think, he is inarticulate, or too stupid, or he reminds me of my idiot brother in law.

Hear this word from this preacher this morning, Set your prejudices aside, ignore the bringer of the words failings and shortcomings, and listen to the Word and open you heart.

Preachers don't have all the answers. And honestly, we struggle with a criticism of our sermons. Sure you can tell me the sermon stunk, but did God at **any** time impart words of challenge, or conviction or, inspiration, or conviction to you?

One of my favorite stories in the Old Testament is found in the Book of Numbers, chapter 22: 22-35. This is a long passage and we will not read it right now, but it is essentially about listening, and how God will use any vehicle, and I mean any vehicle to get his Word out. Balaam the prophet of God is riding on his donkey, his faithful beast of burden. Now the angel of the Lord has spoken to Balaam previously and Balaam has responded in the past. But as he rides his donkey this particular day, the angel of the Lord stand in the road and Balaam misses it. He misses the angel of the Lord. He is not watching or listening. He is out of sync with the Spirit. But the donkey sees the Lord's angel. And the donkey turns off the road and goes into the field. Balaam is furious and beats the donkey relentlessly until the donkey gets back on the road.

Again, the angel of the Lord stands in front of Balaam and the donkey. This time it occurs in a vineyard with narrow walls nearby and the donkey shies away from the angel of the Lord and runs Balaam into the wall scraping Balaam's foot and leg. Balaam is now really angry and beats the donkey furiously.

And then a third time as God is so prone to do, the angel of the Lord appears to Balaam the prophet and his faithful donkey. The donkey sees the angel of the Lord again in his path and just lies down.

And then Balaam goes ballistic. Enraged at this beast, Balaam raises his staff and beats the donkey over and over. And in that moment, the Lord God opens the mouth of the faithful little animal. "What have I done to you that you strike me these three times?" And Balaam responds to the talking donkey, "I beat you because you have made a fool of me, I wish I had a sword in my hand. I would kill you right now!" And the donkey responds and says, "Am I not your donkey who you have ridden and I have provided faithful service to you all these years?"

And with these questions hanging in the air, the Lord opens the eyes of Balaam and NOW he sees the angel of the Lord standing before him. The angel of the Lord says, "Why have you struck your

...the donkey saw me and turned away. If the animal had not turned away just now I would have killed you and let the donkey live.”

What is the moral of that text? That sometimes even one as hapless, stubborn, or as lowly as a donkey can communicate the word of the Lord God. It might be a person lacking in oratory skills presenting the Word, but it is still God’s word. The law of the Lord is perfect and will revive your souls. Any preacher must realize that to one degree or another, he or she may be like a donkey. Even someone not blessed with perfect speaking skills can bring God’s message.

The Lord God gives us words in the Bible, words of life, words of hope, words of encouragement, words of salvation. Get out of your self righteousness as you listen to the Word of God proclaimed.

Never idolize the church, the denomination, or the personality of the preacher. Billy Graham or John Wesley. They are just men or women. Too often we sit in judgment on the preacher, or we are too lackadaisical when we hear the sermon preached on Sunday. There needs to be a tension between critical and non critical thinking when we hear God’s Word proclaimed as we listen. The Word of God opened to you in the form of someone reading scripture, can actually be the Word of God being preached to you. Even from Balaam’s donkey...

Listen to God’s word, listen to the Holy Spirit. Act on that divine nudge from God. Take it in, and drink it in, revel in it, be transformed by God’s Word. Would you pray with me, “Lord of all creation we love to hear your word proclaimed, and we love to read your Word. The God inspired words of your prophets and teachers of the Bible inspire and comfort us. The words through song, praise, prayer and power preaching of the Word in our lives challenge, convict, comfort and cause us to sometimes wrestle with the scriptures. Lord we ask for enlighten and we ask for ears with which to listen. And as we listen let us take in your word and make it be our own as we live to serve your son, Jesus the Christ in the power of the Spirit. Amen.”