

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

"How Do We Hear the Voice of God?" (part 2)

THE CONSCIENCE CONTINUED

Last week we began to look at our vision statement in detail – *transforming lives through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ*. What does that mean? We can be changed or transformed into what God wants us to be through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And that means that 1) God is personal and I can have a one-on-one relationship with Him. 2) It through Jesus Christ because He is the One who has made God known to us, and He is the One through His blood, His death on a cross, that we can have a relationship with the Father and 3) It is a relationship and that means there will be one-on-one communication between us and God.

And if there is going to be one-on-one communication with the Living God, then we need to be able to answer the question on ***"How Do We Hear the Voice of God?"*** Is there anything more important in life? Some may say that obeying God is most important. But you can't obey that which you don't know. And when we speak of hearing the voice of God, we are talking about being able to know what God is saying to us. In other words, how do we know God's voice in our world?

There are many voices in life. Many are false. And a voice that speaks falsehood will never result in your long term good. It may seem good for the short term. That is the problem with temptation. In the short term it will give us a satisfying benefit, but in the long term? It will leave us worse off than when we began. So we need to be able to know how God is speaking to us and what He is saying.

And also recall how we saw that God's visible and physical presence does not guarantee anything and is not the answer for following Him. Adam and Eve, Noah, Moses and the people of Israel, the Twelve Apostles all experienced God first-hand with all five of their physical senses but that did not keep them from falling away.

THE SEVEN PRIMARY WAYS GOD SPEAKS TO MANKIND

So how does God speak to us? Seven ways – He speaks to us through 1) Creation 2) Our Conscience 3) God's Word 4) The Lord Jesus Christ 5) The Holy Spirit 6) Other believers 7) Life experience. The most important three are in the middle or at the top of the pyramid – God's Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

We looked at Creation. And then the human conscience. God has placed the capacity to know right from wrong in us because we are made in God's image. It is what separates us from the animal world. And the good and the right way is defined by God. And God is love. So goodness and righteousness flow from love. And love is simply defined in the Scriptures as being selfless and serving others. In other words, you can't truly love unless you give of yourself to another. God is love and continually gives Himself to others. Otherwise, we would not be here – we would not be alive. The opposite of love is not merely hate, it is sin. And sin is simply doing what you think and feel is best for you regardless of what

God and other people think. As our catechism defines it, sin is the seeking of our own will instead of God's will. How are we to respond to our sin? Repentance. What is repentance? Turning from self and turning to God in Christ. You see, the Gospel is not complicated. It is why Jesus said, *the Kingdom of God is for such as they* and the they was a reference to children!

Now we already looked at **Romans 1:18-25** to see how God speaks to us through the Creation and our conscience. I want us now to look at **Romans 2:12-16** to see how the Apostle Paul further elaborates on the conscience: ***"For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; 13for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. 14For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, 16on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus."***

So you see, it doesn't matter if one has the law or not; deep down we know right from wrong. Deep down we know the difference between being selfish and being selfless. As a result, everyone is without excuse and is under God's judgment since all have sinned – put self first to the detriment of God and others. **James 4:17** puts it this way, ***"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."***

GOD'S PERSONAL COMMUNICATION – HIS WORD

But it is not enough for God to speak to us through His Creation and our conscience. Those two ways alone will not lead us into all truth. God has to give us further clarity. He has to give us direction. He has to personally reveal Himself to us. You see I can know there is a God, that He is powerful and majestic and a God of order from the Creation, but I can't know Him personally. I can know that there is right and wrong and truth and error from my conscience, but I can't know God personally if it is just left up to my conscience. In fact, because I am innately selfish, even though I can see the good and realize that I am not an island or my own master, I will operate that way if left to my own devices.

So God has to intervene and He does. He comes to us through various ways. The Bible calls anything God does to show Himself or His will, "words." These words or messages are called the Word of the Lord. So it shouldn't surprise us that God came to Noah and Abraham and others in visions and dreams and audible voices. It shouldn't surprise us that the angels visited Abraham and Lot, Jacob and Daniel, or that God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and in the dreams of Kings David and Solomon. It shouldn't surprise us that God did mighty miracles through His prophets and for His people. And it is why we read in **Jeremiah 1:4** that Jeremiah writes, ***"Now the Word of the Lord came to me saying..."*** or that Luke wrote concerning John the Baptist in **Luke 3:2**, ***"in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness."*** The word would come to His prophets by audible voice or by the inner voice of His Spirit.

So God said and did mighty acts and God's people recorded them. And they became Holy Scriptures - God's written word. That doesn't mean that all that is written down is the only time God

spoke and did supernatural things for His people. Do you remember what the Apostle John wrote at the end of His Gospel? He said in **Jn. 21:25**, *"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written."*

The main way God speaks to us personally is just like He spoke to all people from Adam and Eve until now - through His Word. It is why Paul says in **Romans 10:17**, *"Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of God."* It's why Paul also wrote in **Romans 15:4**, that *"For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."* And in **2 Tim. 3:16-17**, *"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."*

Now do you see why Satan seeks to get us to question, doubt and ignore God's Word? He did so in the garden when He said to Eve *"Did God say, you shall die when you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?"* and then blatantly called God a liar when he retorted *"You surely won't die!"*

GOD'S PERSONAL COMMUNICATION – HIS SON

But the words from the Lord are not enough. God's ultimate Word is Himself. And that is exactly what He did, He sent not just a word, but Himself. THE WORD! Let's look at one of the most important passages in all of Scripture:

John 1:1-18: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."*

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15John testified about Him and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 16For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. 18No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

So we not only have words from God, we have THE WORD of God. We have God Himself speaking to us. And God does so through Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 1:1-2** puts it this way: *"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2in these last days has spoken to us in His Son..."*

But this declaration does not merely come from the Apostles and Prophets. It comes directly from Jesus, Himself. Jesus affirms this reality over and over again when He declares that He and the Father are One! That He is the Light of the World and the Bread of Life. That He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. That He is the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, That He is the Way,

the Truth, and the Life. And why after uttering those words He said in **Jn. 14:7**, ***“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.”***

But Christ is not with us now physically is He? He can’t be with us always physically right for He ascended into heaven. But Jesus gave us a clue for how we are to be in a personal relationship with Him. For He told the Samaritan woman at the well, ***those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth.***

Summed up on the night before He died, Jesus promised us that He would send another Helper corresponding to Himself – the Person of the Holy Spirit. **Jn. 14:16-17**: ***“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”***

Jn. 14:25-26: ***“These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. 26“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”***

It’s why Jesus said earlier in **Jn. 14:12-15**, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. 13“Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14“If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. 15“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”***

GOD’S PERSONAL COMMUNICATION – THE HOLY SPIRIT

“Greater things you will do in my name.” How and why? By virtue of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of Christ – who can be in all of us at the same time and who can perfect the work of Christ within us.”

When Jesus walked the earth, He could only be in one place at one time. But with the Spirit, He can be everywhere. In fact, if Jesus shows us the Father, it is the Spirit who shows us the Son! **Jn. 16:13-15**: ***“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.14“He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. 15“All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.”***

And when we are born again, the Spirit of Christ enters our hearts and we now have Christ in person with us. But because this is a relationship, there must be communication. And in order for there to be communication, we must take the time to listen to what the Spirit is saying. And we do that through God’s word, through meditating on Christ and by observing what is going on in our lives. And the Holy Spirit will then take what we are praying about and reflecting on and then will speak to us.

For our prayer life is as much about us conveying our praise, thankfulness, humility, and desires before God as it is listening to His Voice.

Remember how Jesus told Thomas in **Jn. 14:7**, ***"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."*** Notice what Christ emphasized? To *know* God— that is even more important than physically seeing Him. How do we get to know Him? Through a personal relationship with Christ. How do we enter into a personal relationship with Christ? By hearing and seeing His Word; and then by following it. Then is how we are born again and when we are born again the Holy Spirit enters our spirit and soul and body! And the way we grown is by abiding in Christ. And when we abide in Christ we will keep His commandments. We will obey His word. Such a relationship of receiving and hearing the words of Jesus is so powerful listen for a moment to what He says about such a relationship later in **14:23-24** – ***"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. 24"******He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. Jn. 15:7: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."***

God's Word is God's message to us. Now I realize that not everyone gets a word from the Lord – whether directly or from Scripture. We don't know why that is – certainly it could be that one is not ready to hear it and therefore it is part of God's mercy. Recall Jesus' words, ***"to much is given much is required."*** (Lk. 12:48) Or when Jesus sent the apostles out two by two and when a village rejected their witness Jesus said ***to shake the dust off your feet and that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that city."*** (Mt. 10:14-15)

So we can't make a judgment call on a person's eternal destiny. But I do know this - if one openly and willingly defies Christ after knowing Who He is, there is no hope for that person. They have committed the unpardonable sin. Even on the cross, do you remember what Christ said? ***"Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing?"*** But He did not say that about Judas who betrayed Him or the religious authorities who condemned Him. The more important issue is not about those who have never heard the Gospel; the more important issue is what about those who have? What are you going to do about it? Again, Jesus said, ***"To much is given much is required."***

We all have been given God's Word, we have heard the Gospel, we have received the invitation of Christ and have been given the Holy Spirit. We have all that we need to not only have the abundant life that Jesus promised to those who would follow, but we have all that we need to make a difference in our families, our church, our community and the world.

And it comes by knowing the voice of God, by listening to it, and by obeying it. Christ has come, He has spoken, and He has entered our hearts through the Holy Spirit. If we are to hear that voice, we must take time out of our hectic and hurried lives - and focus on Christ, on His Word. We must listen to what the Holy Spirit is speaking to us, and we must make every effort to follow what He is telling us. The more we do that, not only will we feel His presence but we will see His power work through us to make us the person He wants us to be and to impact those around us for His glory.

Next week, we will see how God speaks to us through the other believers and life experience. Until then may we seek to hear and follow the voice of the Lord! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!