Open Ears, Closed Mouth

1 Kings 19:9-18; Psalm 29 and John 10:1-18, 27

Central Idea: How do we hear God’s voice?

Introduction

As a legally blind person, I count a lot on context and environment to decipher what’s going on in my life. When I meet someone new, I try to learn all kinds of things about them, with as much observance as I can without being creepy. I try to notice their clothing selections, the way they walk, their manœuvrings, if I can see them, and a host of other little things that make people different. This is crucial because I can’t just recognize someone by looking at them. I can’t see you from far away. So I rely on certain cues that help me realize it’s you, and not someone else.

One of the very best cues, and not just for legally blind people, is a person’s voice. Did you know that every single person has a distinct voice? Sure, it can sound similar to someone else’s, but yours is distinct. I can usually tell who I’m talking to, especially a familiar voice, within the first three to four words I hear. I train myself to listen closely, because I need that sense to know what’s going on and who’s talking.

In our walk with the Lord, and in our following the Holy Spirit, it is no different. God also has a distinct voice and we can train ourselves to be sensitive to it and to hear it. God is always speaking, but we’re not always listening. Let’s take a look at some of the more familiar examples of God speaking in the Bible.

Text – 1 Kings 19:9-18

9 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?” 10 He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” 11 And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. 13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 14 He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” 15 And the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the
wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. 16 And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. 17 And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. 18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

I. God’s voice uses several forms (1 Kings 19:9-18).
   A. There are many mediums for God’s voice.
      1. Especially when we look at Psalm 29, we see that God does speak through fire. Remember the burning bush where God spoke to Moses on holy ground. It is not uncommon for Him to use fire.
      2. In Revelation 10:4, there are seven thunders, very closely related in one possibility to the seven Spirits of God, a suggestion that God speaks seven things that cannot be revealed until the time He utters them.
      3. Throughout the Bible, God speaks in ways that get our attention. As we will see in this passage, sometimes it is getting to a place that is quiet, and other times, He roars like a lion, like in Amos.
      4. The incredible point of this experience that Elijah had with God was that Elijah had to be so in tune with the voice of God, that he could recognize it in whatever form it arrived.
      5. There seems to be a general and gradual learning of God’s voice. Samuel, a young man who is named “God hears,” because God heard his mother’s cry for a son, goes through this experience as well.
      6. God calls to Samuel, and while he hears the voice, he thinks it is Eli, the high priest, calling for him in the night for his help. He goes to Eli and Eli then realizes it is God’s voice.
      7. There’s an interesting note in that section of Scripture. There is a verse that tells us that “God’s voice was not heard much in Israel in this time.” This is right after the time of the Judges, where people did not always listen to God.
      8. The implication is that when we don’t listen to God, He stops talking until someone is willing to listen. God waits for us to hear. He is never silent when His people come prepared to hear from Him.
      9. Application: We need to always be attentive and ready to hear God’s voice. No matter what form it takes, whether it is through His Word, through a prophetic voice, or just through the wisdom of another believer, God is speaking to us always. But we are the ones not listening!
   B. We must know which one God is using.
1. Because God can speak through so many mediums and in so many different situations and settings in life, our job as believers is to be sensitive enough to hear His distinct voice among the storms of life.

2. God uses different tones and different voices with us in different situations, just like in any other relationship. One of the most common ways we ignore God’s voice is in prayer.

3. Although prayer is a fancy word for communicating with God, many people never listen in their prayer time. They just talk. They ask God for this or that. They never sit in silence and wait to hear from Him.

4. Illustration: Have you ever had to put up with someone who didn’t breathe when they talked? These are people who don’t allow any response. My favorite part is when they ask questions, but you have nowhere to place an answer. They answer the question and move on. It’s not a conversation, but a monologue. There’s no room, no dead space, no silence. If they don’t take a breath soon, you’ll not only have an opportunity to speak, but you may have to revive them when they pass out on the floor!

5. Sometimes in our prayer life, we are that way. I have a contention that people don’t like the silence because they are not comfortable with it. They are not comfortable with who they are. They need noise. Even if it were silent, they would not be at peace enough to focus on God’s voice.

6. There are some times where God’s booming voice is absolutely necessary. There are times when louder is helpful. But there are also times when quiet is what is needed. God deals with us in our moods. When we are being stubborn and insolent, He has no trouble getting louder, and declaring through every facet of our life that we need to listen.

7. But it takes more training in our world that is so full of voices to be able to focus on His voice. In a world of noise, the ability to tune out the trash and the extra noise, to make that the white noise of our background and focus on God’s voice is more challenging. We have to filter out the other noise.

8. When we are alone with our own thoughts and silence, many do not like what they do hear, even it if is their own voice internally. Sometimes the silence does wonders for our souls because there may be things that are uncovered in silence that we need to deal with. That also is God speaking to us!

9. Application: I challenge you this week to find just 10 minutes of completely quiet time every day this week. Turn off the radio, and everything around you. Sit in silence and just be. Allow God to speak to you. You will not necessarily hear God’s audible voice, but you will know when He speaks. He might bring up something you need to be obedient in
your walk with God. He may speak a word of comfort or encouragement to you. But you need His life-giving word!

Text – Psalm 29

A Psalm of David. 1 Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness. 3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters. 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. 6 He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. 7 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. 8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. 9 The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, “Glory!” 10 The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. 11 May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

II. God’s voice is powerful and mighty (Psalm 29).

A. His voice can destroy objects when uttered.

1. We saw in Elijah’s life, God had to set him straight on his wrong assumptions that he was the only prophet of God left. We saw that in that time of emotional turmoil, and the effects of being struck on a mountain of victory that when he ran into the wilderness, this was a good quiet place for God to speak to him.

2. We saw in that passage just how dangerous the presence of God really is! When God passes by the mountain, He breaks stuff. It’s almost like the voice of the Lord is the calm of a mighty storm!

3. And that is exactly the imagery we get from Psalm 29. God’s voice is a powerful thing. Think about this: With God’s voice, He created the universe! Imagine how powerful it is that the spoken word makes things happen!

4. Illustration: Parents can understand this at least on a small level. It’s that powerful voice of the disciplinarian that warns of impending doom when a child is not willing to be obedient. Or maybe that calming voice that helps a child relax. To a certain extent, the voice has the power to affect change, but it is nothing like God’s voice!

5. God affected change with His voice, and there was no waiting for a decision from what He was talking to. The difference between my voice affecting change and God’s is that mine requires the person to weigh a decision to listen or not. God’s voice forced creation to do His will.
6. Elijah saw firsthand the power of God’s presence. As we will discover next week, there is a powerful connection between God’s Spirit and presence. But when God passed by the prophet, there was a storm that followed Him, and then the still voice in the silence, the eye of that storm.

7. **Application:** It is in the storms of life especially that we need to hear God’s voice. Amidst the chaos, we need to be directed, comforted, exhorted and challenged. His voice can bring peace to our hearts. His voice can deal with any problems we have. Hearing from Him calms us in the storm.

B. His voice comes out of who He is.

1. God’s voice is so powerful because His voice comes from His character. God is powerful and mighty Himself, and so when He speaks, His voice is just as efficient and effective.

2. We produce what we are, and God is powerful. His voice is clear and it gets things done. It is a voice that demands action. When God wants to communicate with anyone, that person will be communicated with.

3. The Bible talks about God’s voice having the ability not only to create, but also to destroy. The verbs used for God’s voice breaking the cedars of Lebanon is the strongest a verb can get. It means smash to pieces, shatter.

4. Throughout the Bible, creation reacts to God’s presence in different ways. The prophets describe creation reacting violently to God when He comes to judge, but creation also dances in His presence when He is not judging.

5. In a very real sense, God’s sovereign control comes through when He speaks. He is not one to ignore. Indeed, no one can ignore Him. Along with that idea is the idea that His word does not return void.

6. With His voice, God accomplishes whatever He sets out to do. His power knows no bounds, and we can all attest to that power that the word of God has in our own lives. When God speaks, everyone hears. They may not listen, but they hear.

7. **Application:** When you hear God’s voice, and you know it’s Him, do you obey what He tells you? Do you question God? Do you react in any other way than obedience? The Bible is full of people who listened to God and were known as righteous because they listened. And there are some who heard and did not listen. Jonah heard, disobeyed, and still found himself fulfilling God’s word! But oh how much better it is when we listen!

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Text – John 10:1-18, 27

1 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of
the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

III. God’s voice is distinct and clear (John 10:1-18, 27)

A. His voice can be known by His people.

1. The key to a conversation about the voice of God is not only to realize the power of His voice or that He speaks in different ways, but also to realize that His name can be known and can be heard.

2. If God’s voice was not distinctive and clear, then hearing from Him might be left up to the spiritually elite or special people. But it is not that way at all. As we read John 10, we find that every believer can hear God’s voice.

3. Not only can they all hear His voice, but they can all follow Him because they hear His voice. His voice is clear and distinct. Its message is understandable.

4. Illustration: Just like I as a legally blind person rely on that unique voice to discover who is talking to me, so also, God’s voice is unique among voices. We live in a world of advertising. There are many voices! “Buy this product,” “Do this with your life,” “Live in the moment…” The voices go on and they are not afraid to dispense their wisdom and advice. God also has wisdom, and is indeed the origin of all wisdom. We must listen in the midst of the noise for His still, small voice.
5. Think about that for a moment! The very voice that created the universe, with power and excellence, wants to speak to you! The God of the universe with all of His power and infinite knowledge wants to communicate with us.

6. Because God’s voice is unique among voices, this calls for believers in Jesus then to know that voice as opposed to other voices. Jesus is quite clear that there are other voices.

7. And in the spiritual realm, there are all kinds of voices around us. There is the devil, his demons and a host of spiritual voices that are not from God Himself. These are some that “spiritualists” in our culture are going to for spiritual information.

8. Application: But we must rely on God’s voice alone in our walk with Him. It is not about what others have to say. We must hear from Him only, and not challenge His word. What He says is true always, and we must humble ourselves before His voice.

B. We must make it our goal and discipline to listen for Him only.

1. In verse 16, John records Jesus talking about “other sheep” who also follow Him. Most likely, this refers to the Gentiles who will become Christians later after His resurrection.

2. In putting together all of the information we have learned about God’s voice, we realize that God’s voice is distinctive. It is clear. It is powerful, And it can be known.

3. This requires on our part as believers in Jesus that we can indeed hear His voice when He speaks. The challenge is to learn His voice. We must know Him, and then we will know His voice.

4. His voice is clear to us in several forms and formats. One of the best ways to learn God’s voice is to read His Word, the Bible. In the Word of God is God’s heart and His words to His people.

5. Another way is to learn through experience God’s voice as He speaks through Scripture and into our hearts. So many times when I need a word from the Lord for a situation I’m in, the Spirit speaks to me through my Bible reading and study.

6. Other times, the Holy Spirit speaks right into our souls. He reminds us of Scriptures we have read, or He speaks through other people. Sometimes, He is part of our conscience as He challenges us.

7. One very important warning about listening to God is that we must not suspect that every time we hear our inner voice it is the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, our own desires gain more of our attention than the voice of God’s Spirit.
8. Always test everything you think is from God. Ask Him for confirmation. Make sure it agrees with Scripture. Make sure it glorifies Him only. Don’t let your circumstances be bigger than God’s voice to you.

9. Throughout the Word of God, especially in the New Testament, there is a direct correlation between hearing and obeying. The word for hear in Greek is akou-o. The word for obey is upa-kou-o. They are from the same semantic family. If you can hear, you are expected to obey!

10. The Bible tells us that “he who has an ear” can hear what the Spirit says to the churches and to the saints. Let us use our ears more than our mouths. Let us be quick to listen to Him! Let us use our spiritual ears to hear from God and be obedient to His leading!

**Conclusion**

God’s voice is incredibly clear and He adjusts to our situations so that we can hear Him. But we have to train ourselves, put in the hard hours of prayer, and get to know His voice, so that we will not be deceived when the time comes. There is no shortcut. Part of our relationship with God is to learn His voice. We must not listen to other voices, for they are misleading. We must have and hear God’s voice. We need to hear Him. He is our Guide, our Shepherd, and our Lord! Let us make every effort to use our ears to hear the only voice that matters!

**Action Points**

- God’s voice is powerful and productive. He can do things just by speaking. He commands the nations, creation, and all things. Is He telling you to do something? What is God saying to you today?
- God’s voice is clear and distinctive. In the white noise of our culture where everyone is afraid of the silence, and being alone with their own thoughts, we must sometimes get away from the noise so that we can focus on God’s voice. What special places help you focus on God’s voice?
- The challenge is to get alone with God so that we can train ourselves to hear and know His voice. This happens as we are in relationship to Him. But if God is indeed ready to speak, then are we able to listen?