

A SERMON PREACHED IN UNIONVILLE

February 26, 2023

GOD, WHAT DID YOU SAY? (HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US)

Scripture: Matthew 13: 13-17

1. It's Lent. The time when we think seriously about our connection with God. When we reflect on God's role in our lives; where God is leading us. What God is saying to us.
 - a. It's the time when we take our spiritual journeys a bit more seriously.
 - b. Of course, that means listening to God, communicating with God. That's Prayer, of course.
 - c. But how do we discern just what it is that God might be trying to say to us? How does God speak to us?
 - i. So as we begin our Lenten journey, I'd like to talk about how it is that God speaks to us.
 - ii. Ours is a faith that believes absolutely that God speaks to us.
 1. God didn't just plop us on this earth and then leave us on our own. Ours is a relationship of love with God and love always involves communication - two way communication. God speaking and our listening; our speaking and God's listening.
 - d. In the Bible, God uses many, different ways to communicate. Many were quite spectacular. Some of them actually pretty bizarre.
 - i. He spoke to Moses through a burning bush. He spoke to Jacob through an angel. He spoke to the entire nation of Israel through a cloud. And yes, in fact one time he spoke to a man named Balaam, through a donkey.
2. Job 33: 13 *"God speaks in different ways but we don't always recognize His voice."* God has many different ways that He speaks to us. He's not limited to any single way.

- a. The problem is we often don't recognize it. We don't realize that it's God talking through that person or whatever it is, talking to us.
3. Our text today indicates how hard it is to communicate with God. Jesus quotes a passage from Isaiah in which the prophet laments, "*You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.*"
- a. God seems to be forever screaming at us, "Can you hear me now?"
 - b. And our thick headed human answer typically is, "Sorry, God, what did you say? I was distracted. Did you say something?"
 - c. As Jesus continues, "*For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.*"
 - d. So we have to work on the perception issue. That's what I want to do this morning.
 - i. This morning we're going to look at just a few of the many ways that God wants to speak to you. These are not the only ways. There are far more than these. But these are four of the very common ways that God speaks to us.

First: God speaks to us through the Bible.

- 1. I start with this one intentionally because it is the number one way that God speaks to us – through God's Word. There are a lot of people who say, "I wish God would speak to me. I want God to send me a text. I want Him to just write it in the sky what He wants me to do." (Magic 8 Ball)
 - a. God is not going to write it in the sky. Primarily because God has already been communicating with you – through God's word.
 - b. Someone has said: God never shuts His mouth until you shut the Bible.
 - c. If you're never opening the Bible, if you're never reading it, God isn't talking to you very much. Because it's the number one way God speaks to us. Everything you need for life is already here in this book.
- 2. Look at what the Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:16 "*Everything in the Scriptures is God's word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live.*"

3. Why did God give us the Bible? It says there are four reasons: to **teach** us, to **help** us, to **correct** us, and to **show us how to live**.
 - a. This is exactly what Belinda was talking about in one of her recent sermons. How important daily time with God's Word is.
 - b. So this Lent, I urge you to set aside a block of time - Even if it's just five minutes.
 - i. In that time you say, "I'm going to sit down and for five minutes a day I'm going to read the Bible. I'm going to let it speak to me. Every day. I'm going to stop and think about it and I will talk back to God in prayer and that way God has my undivided attention for five minutes, ten minutes, whatever a day. He's got my attention and I can let Him speak to me."

Second: God speaks through Godly friends and family

1. Godly friends and family. This one we often discount. Because often we ignore those who are closest to us or we dismiss what they have to say or we discount it or we devalue it. "You're just my mom/dad/brother/sister. You're just a friend."
 - a. We don't realize that God actually puts people around us and then puts ideas into their mind to say things to you all the time. They're the "angels" in our lives - Godly messengers.
 - b. Proverbs 12:26 *"The godly give wise advice to their friends. The wicked lead them astray."*
2. I want to share something personal with you: I was going through a very trying time in the wake of my mother's unexpected death. Sue and I were newly weds - just starting our life together.
 - a. I was burdened with a grief I couldn't shake. That's because it was guilty grief. I was second guessing myself with "coulda, shoulda woulda's." If only . . . And there in one of my downer moments, Sue spoke to me directly, firmly: "Dave, it's not your fault. You didn't know; you couldn't know. It didn't happen because to you."
 - b. Somehow that firm, strong, and lovingly delivered message penetrated me. I could almost feel the weight lift from my soul.

- c. And in an incredible way, I could go on from that moment and move into a kind of peace with what had happened.
 - i. I'm convinced that was a God moment. God was speaking through my bride.
 - d. We all have blind spots. (Some of us have bald spots. But all of us have blind spots.) You have things in your life that you're never going to see that need to be corrected in your life. God puts people around you to tell you the truth. Everybody needs somebody in their life who loves them enough to tell them the truth.
3. I pray you have somebody like that in your life.
 4. Proverbs 12:15 *"Fools think they know what is best, but a sensible person listens to advice"* That's a good verse for the refrigerator door!
 - a. No, Don't put it on your spouse's mirror! Put it somewhere for you to read. How about this Good News Translation: *"Stupid people always think they are right. Wise people listen to advice."* God wants to speak through other people to you. And that takes humility.
 5. And think about this: this means that not only might God be trying to speak to you through a friend or loved one, but maybe God wants to use you to speak to someone you know.
 - a. Some of you, you know somebody. You've got a friend or a relative or husband or father or brother or sister or somebody you work with and they are headed down the wrong path and you know it.
 - b. You can see it as clear as day. They're doing something that's just messing up their life. You can see it and you have kept your mouth zipped.
 - c. You have said nothing. You have kept silent and you have not loved them enough to speak truth in their lives. As a result you've used the 21st century cop-out "It's none of my business."
 6. It is your business if you love them. Love cares. And if you care you'll be aware and you'll dare to share. That's love. Love says I love you enough as a friend to not let you do this.
 - a. And that's how you frame it: Not from a holier than thou place, but from caring, humble love. As Paul said: *"Speak the truth in love,"*

Third: God speaks through pain.

1. Those of us in the Tuesday Class know this - we were talking about it last week: God loves us so much that God will be there in our pain. In that painful moment God will speak to us. This pain sometimes is the only way we open our hearts to God.
 - a. I'm not saying that all the pain in our lives is God trying to speak to us. I'm not saying that the pain is even caused by God. That's not what I'm saying.
 - b. But I do know that in some of the painful circumstances I faced, God spoke to me through those circumstances. I think we've all seen that happen in our lives. God uses pain when He can't get us to slow down and listen.
2. I was reflecting on my own life as I thought about this point in the sermon.
 - a. I thought of moments about how God has used pain in my life to speak to me - and I was flooded with thoughts and deep emotions.
 - b. I can think of the more difficult times in my ministry when I learned so much about myself and I came out of those episodes, leaning on God more profoundly and becoming a stronger and better minister.
 - c. I can think of a time when I was a boy and nearly died from spinal meningitis. It was pivotal in my life – and made me realize that every day is a gift from God.
 - d. There have been many times when pain or difficulty has directed my walk and changed my life – eventually for the better.
3. I think of Proverbs 20:30. (This is a painful verse.) *“Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways.” (GNT)*
 - a. We know that's true. We've all seen the truth of that verse in our lives. We change when we get desperate. Often it's only when we hit the bottom that we can look up.
4. The Bible says in Psalm 119:71 *“The suffering You sent was good for me. For it taught me to pay attention to Your principles.”* Pain is often like a spiritual hearing aid in our lives.
 - a. C. S. Lewis once said “God whispers to us in our pleasures but He shouts to us in our pain.”

One overall final point to these ways that God can communicate to us: The common element in all of these ways of God's speaking to us – through God's Word, through the counsel of other good Christian friends, and even through pain – is **THE HOLY SPIRIT**.

1. God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. Greek word = "Paraclete" Comes "along side" us.
2. In John 14:26 Jesus says this: *"The Holy Spirit will be your teacher and will bring to your mind all I have said to you."* The Bible calls the Holy Spirit our teacher. It also calls Him our counselor, our advocate, our comforter, our helper. He's like a personal coach, a personal mentor.
 - b. God's Word – how does it become that voice of God for you? (Holy Spirit)
 - c. Friend speaks to you – and you just know, that was not a coincidence, but guidance from God. How do you know that? (Holy Spirit)
 - d. Pain – it can drive you closer to God. How? (Holy Spirit).
 - e. Holy Spirit – Tuner on a radio.
3. God's Word / Other Christian Friends / Painful Experiences
 - a. In each, God is asking, "Can you hear me now?" You bet – if you let the Holy Spirit tune you in.
 - b. Then you will know the blessing of Jesus: *"But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear."*
 - c. May you "get an earful" this Lenten season!

Matthew 13: 13-17

13 This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see;

though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;

you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

15

For this people’s heart has become calloused;

they hardly hear with their ears,

and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,

hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts

and turn, and I would heal them.’^[a]

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears

because they hear. 17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and

righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it,

and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.