

Look and Listen Part 8

We've been talking about the importance of looking to and listening to Jesus, to the Biblical, Scriptural Jesus. The reason is because we want to be like Jesus, to live as he called us to live. Just because someone says a prayer or listens to praise and worship music, just because someone claims to know Jesus and speaks in his name, if they aren't acting in and living in his nature, there's a problem. They claim his name and then constantly sow division, demeaning and demonizing others. We need to look to Jesus and listen to him and then live and act and speak like him. Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, **“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”** Ephesians 5:1-2. Look to Jesus, listen to Jesus, and then live like Jesus. Live a life of loving others, give yourself to God, fully surrendered to him. This is how he calls us to live!

We ask, what would Jesus do? I can suggest a few things. Read Matthew 5-7, the sermon on the mount. It's the core of Jesus' ethical teaching, a manual on how to treat others. Love your enemies, forgive those that wrong you and take advantage of you, be salt and light, don't rage against others, give to those in need, pray and don't worry. These are some of the ways you know someone knows Jesus. People that know Jesus bear fruit and by their fruit you will recognize them Jesus said. Then he warned, “watch out for false prophets, ferocious wolves in sheep's clothing. Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my Father.” Even miracle workers are excluded if they worked in his name but not in his nature. Yes, he talks about Jesus a lot and points out all the sinners, but does he live like Jesus? Does he love like Jesus? Does he walk in holiness? Does he reflect the nature of Jesus we see in the Scripture? Does he do what Jesus would do?

What would Jesus do? What is Jesus like? Look at Galatians 5, the Fruit of the Spirit. **“Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”** I often call these the character qualities of Jesus. Paul writes, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” If we belong to Jesus, we crucify the flesh, we die to sin and self and live and walk according to the Spirit, bearing this kind of fruit. Jesus reflects these qualities and so should we. Look, listen and be imitators of Jesus.

Also in Galatians 5 Paul says the acts of the sinful nature are obvious. Things like **“Sexual immorality, impurity, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition,**

dissensions, factions and envy.” These things are contrary to the nature of Jesus, contrary to the life and fruit of the Spirit. All of that sounds like politics in America, it sounds like much of the public discourse in our culture, it sounds like most of what I read on social media and every news source around. It may sell products and fire up people, but it doesn’t sound like Jesus, it doesn’t reflect his nature. It doesn’t draw people to Jesus. I read something this week that suggested before a Christian posts anything on social media they should ask, how will this affect my ability to share Christ with someone? Live in such a way that our lives testify of Jesus and point others to Jesus, that we reflect his nature and his character.

In this series we’ve talked about looking to and listening to Jesus. In John 10, Jesus said we are his sheep and he is the good shepherd. He said his sheep know his voice but they won’t recognize or respond to a stranger’s voice. So, how do we hear him? Perhaps the question we need to ask first is: **How does he speak? Through what means or methods?**

When we look at the Scripture, we see that God spoke through angels, prophets, through creation, through circumstances and opportunities, visions and dreams, gifts of the Spirit, preachers and teachers. Of course the bible says Jesus is the ultimate way God speaks to us. **“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” Hebrews 1:1-3** Jesus is the ultimate way God speaks to us, but again, what methods does he use? How do we hear? Ultimately we can say God speaks by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said **“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14:25-26** Jesus makes that commitment to communicate with us, that the Holy Spirit will teach us, guide us and remind us of all Jesus has said. He brings Jesus’ words to light in the dark places of our life. Jesus even said that if we were brought to trial for our faith, don’t worry about what to say. “Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.” Mark 13:11 We know God Speaks by the Holy Spirit and can speak to us and through us.

But how? At times I think the Holy Spirit speaks to us by what we might call promptings of the Holy Spirit. “I just felt I was to do this...to say this...to tell you this.” Many of you can relate to that. You might not say Jesus spoke to you, but you could say you felt led to do something. It’s one of the ways he speaks, but we have to be tuned in, listening, sensitive to the

Holy Spirit, responsive to his prompting. Remember that prompting will be consistent with the nature of Jesus revealed in the Scripture.

He speaks through his written word, the bible. It's why we are to read and study the Word of God. What does it say? What does it mean for us? How do we apply God's word to our daily lives, to our world? The Psalmist said God's word is a light to our path, knowing it will keep us from sinning. And consider this: Jesus is the Living Word of God. ("The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.") Jesus explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the day of his resurrection, how the Scriptures, meaning the Old Testament, testify to and speak of him. It only makes sense then that the Scripture, the written word of God, bears witness to and reveals the Living Word of God. As he speaks through his written word, it too will be consistent with the character and nature of Jesus. The written word of God is not going to tell you to do something that is contrary to the nature of Jesus, the Living Word of God. The witness of the Holy Spirit will testify and point to Jesus as well as the Spirit makes application of the word of God to our lives.

Another way He speaks is through his church, through the faithful witness of the past 2,000 years. He speaks through the creeds and the councils of the church in addition to the written word of God. There is danger in teachers and so called prophets and churches that espouse doctrines contrary to the collective and consistent teaching of the church for the past 2,000 years. Methods change, methodology changes, but the truth of God's word stands firm. Paul tells Timothy, **"What you have heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you - guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us."** 2 Timothy 1:13-14 Guard against voices that are not accountable to the church. Listen to sound teaching, the doctrine of truth found in God's word. Are there differences of opinions about doctrinal issues? Sure. But there is unity in the essentials of our faith. I point you to the apostles creed or the Nicene creed. These are the essentials that Christians believe. He still speaks through his church.

How do we listen to Jesus? How do we hear? We have to tune our hearts, our spiritual ears to Jesus, to his presence, to the Holy Spirit. Quiet your heart and your surroundings, talk to Jesus and then listen. Read the Scripture and then listen again. "Lord, is there something you want me to hear, to see, to know? Speak Lord, I'm listening."

Two weeks ago we talked about Peter walking on the water to Jesus. Peter took his eyes off of Jesus, he stopped looking to Jesus when he saw the wind and the waves and he began to sink. Last Sunday we talked about King Jehoshaphat looking out at a vast army coming against him. He could have been so distracted that he couldn't or wouldn't see the Lord or hear the instruction the Lord gave him. Instead you remember, he set himself to seek the Lord. He purposefully, intentionally looked to and listened for the Lord. "We are powerless against this army and we don't know what to do, but our eyes are upon you." It was when he focused on the Lord that the Lord spoke to him through one of the men in the crowd.

So many things can blind us and deafen us to Jesus, making it difficult to see and difficult to hear. We have to find a way. Clear the distractions. Quiet the noise and set your heart to listen. Tune out the worry and fear, and tune in to heaven's peace and purpose. He is speaking!

Forgive me for this rambling sermon. I just felt "prompted" to share from my heart about listening to and hearing from Jesus. I don't know who this is for...but look at this.

In Exodus 19 Moses and the children of Israel are at Mt. Sinai in the wilderness. God speaks to Moses and tells him to tell the people, **"I am going to come to you in a dense cloud so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you."** **Exodus 19:9.** The bible says "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud over the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled." As the Lord spoke to Moses, the bible says **"When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled in fear...and said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.'" Exodus 20:19**

What is it about God's voice that sounds like thunder? Or like a trumpet? Moses could hear him and understand him, but the people were just frightened as they heard thunder. Perhaps at times that's what we all hear. I need a word from God but I just hear sound, thunder, noise. "Lord I'm listening but uncertain of what I hear."

In John 12, Jesus is in the last week before his crucifixion. He says **"Now my heart is troubled and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father glorify your name! Then a voice came from heaven. 'I have glorified it and will glorify it again.'** The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him." **John 12:27-29.** Some said it

thundered, but Jesus said “This voice was for your benefit, not mine.” Sometimes his voice sounds like thunder, but we keep listening, in faith. We keep looking to Jesus. John in Revelation speaks of the voices of the seven thunders speaking. Something about thunder and voices in Scripture.

In Revelation 14 John says, **“I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder.” Revelation 14:2** Remember in Revelation 1 when Jesus spoke to John his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. Now in 14 he hears the sound of rushing waters and loud thunder. He wasn’t hearing voices or words, but he kept listening. He couldn’t distinguish it, but he kept listening. He tuned his spiritual ear by faith and as he listened, the sound of thunder began to change. **“The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.” Revelation 14:2** How did the sound go from thunder to harp music? Because he kept listening. Maybe it wasn’t the sound changing as much as it was his ear, beginning to discern more than just noise or volume. Have you ever been in another country or around people speaking with an accent? You can’t understand at first but over time your ear adjusts. The sound, their accent didn’t change, they still speak the same, but your ear and your understanding, your comprehension changed. John kept listening and through the thunder he heard the harp. And then he writes **“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.” Revelation 14:3** From thunder to harp music to lyrics and voices singing a new song. A song the martyrs sang. I know it speaks of the 144,000, but perhaps that number is symbolic of all those who choose to take up their cross and follow Jesus. Verse 4 says “they follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” These are the ones who are willing to surrender all, to lay down their lives for Jesus and die to self. Perhaps the key to listening, the key to hearing Jesus is found in surrender. “Lord, I’m listening and I’m saying yes to you. Whatever you are saying, my answer is Yes!” And when we say yes, the thunder begins to sound like harpists playing their harps, and then we hear the lyrics and we learn a new song, a song of praise, a song only the redeemed, the obedient, the surrendered can sing.

I’ve got to wrap this up, but in 1982, battling with depression and deep despair, everything sounded like frightening thunder to me. I prayed, but so consumed with fear and worry, all I could hear was thunder. Where are you Lord? Why aren’t you responding? Why aren’t you speaking to me? Discouraged, burdened, anguished, but I kept looking and listening.

Three years of darkness with occasional glimpses of light, occasional faint sounds of something other than thunder. I kept looking and listening until finally, the thunder sounded like harpists playing their harps. Through it all, I kept learning to surrender, myself, my life, my children and family, my goals and plans and desires, ambitions and dreams. I don't believe God withheld anything from me but I couldn't see or hear him. Perhaps like the Israelites, fear kept me from hearing him. All I could hear was thunder. Understand, every challenge gives us opportunity to surrender, opportunity to listen again, to look again. "All I can hear is thunder." Good at least you can hear the thunder. Keep listening, keep turning your heart toward Jesus and tuning your ear to the Holy Spirit. He that has ears to hear, let him hear. You'll have to choose to listen. Now that you know there is something beneath or behind the thunder, don't ignore it. Listen. Then one day, your ears will be opened and you'll say, "I think I hear harp music. Wait, I hear voices singing, words to a beautiful song." And the Holy Spirit will teach you the lyrics and you'll sing that song of surrender and worship and praise.

Don't stop listening and looking. Don't give up. Through your storm, through the darkness, through the fear, keep looking and listening to Jesus. It may only sound like thunder today, but God is speaking, keep listening, the sound is about to change. "Jesus, in our fear, in our trouble, in our doubts, even in the storms, let us hear the music behind the thunder as we keep looking and listening to you."