

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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Moses

“He Still Speaks”

Exodus 3:1-6

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Without a doubt, one of the most difficult skills of communication for all of us is that of listening! A great example of this is that of President Franklin D. Roosevelt who got tired of smiling that big smile and saying the usual things at all those White House receptions. So, one evening he decided to find out whether anybody was paying attention to what he was saying. He did something I think was pretty extreme when as each person came up to him with hand extended to shake his, he flashed that big smile and said, “I murdered my grandmother this morning.” People would automatically respond with comments such as “How lovely!” or “Just continue with your great work!” Nobody listened to what he was saying, except one foreign diplomat. When the president said, “I murdered my grandmother this morning,” the diplomat responded softly, “I’m sure she had it coming to her.” If listening is a challenge in our communication with each other, it is certainly just as challenging or maybe even more so to listen carefully to God when we are communicating with God. When is the last time we heard God speak to us or that we have intentionally taken the time and effort to listen to God? God actually speaks to us all the time as He is doing right now! The question is, are we listening, are we tuned in? Let us look at one example in the life of Moses where God went to great lengths to get Moses’ attention and to speak to Him.

By the time we come to Exodus 3, we learn the first 40 years of Moses’ life were spent growing up in Egypt in Pharaoh’s home. Then Moses’ life changes over night when Moses becomes a fugitive of the law as a result of killing an Egyptian official who was beating an Israelite slave. When Pharaoh learned of the crime, he tried to kill Moses. This led to Moses fleeing to a place called Midian and eventually getting married into a religious family, where his father-in-law was a Midianite priest. Moses then settles down, starts a family, and a career as a shepherd for the next 40 years. All of this happened in Exodus 2.

EXODUS 3:1-6

One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn’t burn up. ³ “This is amazing,” Moses said to himself. “Why isn’t that bush burning up? I must go see it.”

⁴ When the LORD saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

“Here I am!” Moses replied.

⁵ “Do not come any closer,” the LORD warned. “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. ⁶ I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Now in chapter 3 when Moses is around 80 years of age, while he is going about his daily routine at work as a shepherd with his sheep, he found himself deep in the wilderness near Mount Sinai. All of a sudden, totally unexpected, in the midst of the quiet wilderness, Moses comes upon something astonishing - a bush that is on fire, but the fire is not consuming the bush. It quickly got his attention. Moses' curiosity got the best of him, and he went to inspect the bush. Then the unthinkable happens; out of the bush itself Moses hears a voice calling his name, “Moses, Moses.” How would you have responded to seeing and hearing this while all alone in the wilderness? Terrified, looking around to see if someone is pulling a prank on you, wondered if you were having a heatstroke, or maybe you were losing your mind?

Moses' response was to say to the voice from the bush, “Here I am.” Then God, the voice from the bush, tells Moses to not come any closer but to take off his filthy sandals because this is holy property that is inhabited by God. Now Moses is very afraid. With fear and trembling, Moses listened very carefully to God introduce Himself to him. At this, Moses was so overwhelmed, he hid his face in His hands in fear. From what we know of Moses' life, this was Moses' first encounter with God. You may have heard the expression, “When you least expect it, expect it.”? God took the initiative to meet with and introduce Himself to Moses as there is no indication Moses was seeking God, but God was seeking Moses. God creatively got His attention through the burning bush. We find in the Bible that in order for us as human beings to meet and talk and have a relationship with God only God can initiate the relationship. Only God can make that possible. We cannot get on God's level on our own. God has to stooped down to our level for us to be able to meet God, have a relationship with God, and to hear God speak. Moses is now at the beginning of a long, miraculous relationship with God that will radically change the direction of Moses' life and it all began with him hearing the voice of God when he least expected it.

VARIETY OF WAYS GOD SPEAKS

The question many of us might have is, that is all fine and good for Moses, but what about us today? Does God still speak to us today? The Old Testament mentions the voice of God over 100 times. God continually spoke to His children and even to those who were not His children. Moses not only heard God speak to him through the burning bush, but Moses met with God on several occasions on Mt. Sinai, especially when God gave him the 10 commandments. Then when the Israelites were travelling in the desert, Moses met with God regularly in a tent called the Tent of Meeting. Later, God communicated to Moses and the Israelites through a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. God also spoke in the Old Testament to a disobedient prophet through a donkey. It is like something you would expect to see in a Disney movie or Shrek. God also spoke to and through prophets or spokespersons for God, and through angels,

visions, and dreams. God spoke through a still small voice within the heart of a prophet, and in one very unusual instance God wrote a message on a wall through a hand that came out of nowhere. Also, in the Old and New Testaments, God spoke through people who wrote letters, history books and beautiful works of poetry, wise sayings, apocalyptic writings, and teachings through various women and men of God, and we now have all those in what we today call the Bible. *Romans 1:2* says, “*God promised this Good News long ago through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.*”

In the New Testament there are many ways God spoke but clearly the most direct and perfect example is when God descended to our level and personally came to us through Jesus to introduce Himself to us, to communicate with us. In *John 1:1, 14, 18* we read that “*¹In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. ¹⁴ So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.*” John calls Jesus the Word, God literally coming to speak God’s Word to us through Jesus the Word. Now we literally have the Holy Spirit living within us, through whom God communicates to us in a wide variety of ways. God has gone to great lengths in the Bible to come and introduce Himself to us, to share His love and His truth with us. God wants a relationship with us where not only do we talk to God, but God talks to us.

Have you heard God speak to you lately? Are you listening right now? Without a doubt, God still speaks to us in much the same way today. If God desires, He can speak to us through an audible voice and through dreams and visions. *Romans 1:19-20* tells us another way that God speaks to all of us as it says, “*¹⁹ They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. ²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So, they have no excuse for not knowing God.*” God speaks to us through all creation: a rainbow, mountains, sunset, ocean, wind through the trees, the beautiful voice of a bird. Elizabeth Barrett Browning said, “Earth’s crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God; But only he who sees takes off his shoes— The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.” God also speaks to us within in our hearts as He did to the prophet Elijah who described hearing the voice of God *1 Kings 19:12* saying, “*And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper.*” That still, small inner voice is that prompting or leading within you just cannot shake or through our conscience directing us to the best path and away from an unhealthy path in our lives. God also speaks to us through a teacher, preacher, counselor, friend, critics, small group or Sunday School class, and through circumstances out in the world sometimes when we least expect it. God not only speaks through these means but another sure way that God speaks to us today is through the Bible. *2 Timothy 3:16-17*, “*¹⁶ All Scripture is **inspired** by God [*“God-breathed,” NIV*] and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.*” The best representation we have today of God speaking to us is through the Bible that the

Church has passed down to us through church history as God's inspired Word. Any of the other ways we believe we have heard God speak to us need to line up with the truths we have today in God's Word. If they contradict God's Word, we are not to receive it.

God uses an endless variety of means to talk to us. If God speaks in all these ways and many other creative ways, then it should be easy to hear God. Have you heard God speak to you lately? I hope we are hearing God speak to us in this worship service. Are we listening? Are we tuned into God?

A former park ranger at Yellowstone National Park tells the story of a ranger leading a group of hikers to a fire lookout. The ranger was so intent on telling the hikers about the flowers and animals that he considered the messages on his two-way radio distracting, so he switched it off. Nearing the tower, the ranger was met by a nearly breathless lookout, who asked why he hadn't responded to the messages on his radio. A grizzly bear had been seen stalking the group, and the authorities were trying to warn them of the danger. Any time we tune out the messages God has sent us, we put at peril not only ourselves, but also those around us. How important it is that we never turn off God's saving communication! God longs for a dialogue with us. God longs to guide and direct our lives according to His will. God longs to communicate encouragement, correction, comfort and His love to us. The problem is there are far too many other distractions or things to which we are listening -- schedules, health problems, laziness, lack of faith. The question then is, are we tuned in to hear God speak to us?

HOW TO TUNE IN TO HEAR GOD SPEAK

How then do we tune in to hear God? Allow me to suggest these important ingredients that serve to put us in a place to listen to God speak:

- 1. *Have Faith. The first thing to do is to believe He is there, He still speaks, and He wants to speak to you.*** Hebrews 11:6, *"And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him."* We have to believe and have faith.
- 2. *Hunger to Hear. The second thing is we have to desire to hear from God.*** We must hunger and thirst to hear God speak to us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said about listening to God when reading the Bible, "I ask with all my strength what God is trying to say to us through [the Bible]; since I have learnt to read the Bible in this way it becomes more marvelous to me every day." Psalm 1:1-2, *"¹ Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. ² But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night."*
- 3. *Look & Listen Everywhere. The third way we can hear God is to look and listen throughout the day, no matter where we are.*** Whether you are at work, on the road, at play, at school, at home, or wherever you may be, tune your ear to God. Jeremiah 29:13 says, *"If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me."*

- 4. Be Still. The final thing to do is to get alone, away from all the distractions of life, and listen to God.** As the great writer of prayer, E.M. Bounds said, "To pray is the greatest thing we can do, and to do it well, there must be calmness, time, and deliberation." Jesus continually got away from the loud, hectic world to be alone with His heavenly Father. Then He could best hear God.

Before refrigerators, people used icehouses to preserve their food. Icehouses had thick walls, no windows and a tightly fitted door. In winter, when streams and lakes were frozen, large blocks of ice were cut, hauled to the icehouses and covered with sawdust. Often, the ice would last well into the summer. One man lost a valuable watch while working in such an icehouse. He searched diligently for it, carefully raking through the sawdust, but couldn't find it. His fellow workers also looked, but their efforts, too, proved futile. A small boy who heard about the fruitless search slipped into the icehouse during the noon hour and soon emerged with the watch. Amazed, the men asked him how he found it. "I closed the door," the boy replied, "lay down in the sawdust and kept very still. Soon, I heard the watch ticking." Often, the question is not whether God is speaking, but whether we are being still enough -- and quiet enough -- to hear. We, too, cannot find God by intensive, bustling search, but must do what *Psalms 46:10* says, "*Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.*" When we take a break from the busyness of life and dedicate time alone with God, it is the perfect time to sit in silence and make ourselves available to God, to take the time to pray and read the Bible, God's Word, and then be ready for God to speak even just the still small voice deep within our souls.

Does God still speak today to you? Yes. He is speaking right now. Do we want to hear God speak to us? Are we then listening to God? What are we doing to tune in to God's voice? Let us not just expect to hear God in some miraculous, supernatural way, but to hear God speak to us as we are just going about our day. God is speaking in countless ways every day, all around us.

Icebreaker I – How would you have responded to seeing a burning bush and hearing God's voice while all alone in the wilderness?

Icebreaker II – Where have you had your most unusual or significant experience with God... your "burning bush?"

1. How do you think Moses felt when God called his name from the burning bush?
 - a. Caught
 - b. In awe
 - c. Stunned
 - d. Confused
 - e. Scared
 - f. Amazed
 - g. Curious
 - h. surprised
2. Why do you think God revealed Himself to Moses in this way?
 - a. For dramatic effect

- b. To get his undivided attention
 - c. To give him an experience to remember when he had his doubts
 - d. Other
- 3. Why do you supposed Moses was afraid to look at God?
- 4. How would you describe your relationship with God right now?
 - a. A burning bush
 - b. A flickering shrub
 - c. A few warn coals from the past
 - d. Ashes in the wind
 - e. Other
- 5. How is it with your soul?
- 6. What are your struggles and successes?
- 7. How might the Holy Spirit and Scriptures be speaking in your life?
- 8. How can this group pray for you this week?