

Answers to Tough Questions about God's Voice

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God's Empowering Presence

Isaiah 50:4-5

This morning I am going to be continuing in a series that I have been doing on the Holy Spirit and on supernatural Christianity—a series I have called “God's Empowering Presence”. Next week I am going to start teaching about spiritual gifts.

You know, the reason I am doing this series is that we have lots and lots of new people in the church. We have probably added about 1200-1400 people in the last three years to this church. And I want to communicate to you our understanding of Christianity which is that Christianity is Trinitarian. It is about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Here in the Vineyard we worship God as Trinity, but we practically want to relate to God as Trinity.

I have communicated throughout this series my own belief that is that much of the church today is only theologically Trinitarian. That is as part of our creed and as part of our statement of faith somewhere we say that we understand the Christian name for God is Trinity. God subsists in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And, in fact, you cannot be a Christian if you do not believe that God is a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the church has always said that and we stand with the church here in the Vineyard regarding this.

But much of the church knows almost nothing about relating to the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's work. And so we have folks who if you ask them, “What is that nature of your relationship with the Holy Spirit?” many of us and most of the church in America would have to say, “I don't have any relationship with the Holy Spirit. I know virtually nothing about him. I believe in God the Father, God the Son and a big gray blur.” We are trying to correct that and to begin to understand his work.

And also to diffuse some of the weirdness that often goes along with an emphasis on the Spirit. I don't believe that you need to become weird in order to be fully empowered by God. I don't think we have to take on the cultural trappings that have been associated with an emphasis on the Holy Spirit—the hype. Or become a Holy Roller, or that we have to advertise everything as “Extravaganza '96!” or “Miracle Service” and all of that. The way that we want to do the supernatural in the church is that we want to be naturally supernatural as just part of our lives and part of our daily existence in our own voices and with our own styles. We want to learn how to move in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And part of learning to move in the power of the Holy Spirit is learning to hear God's voice which is what we began talking about last week. I shared with you last week that I think the great dividing line in the church today is about whether God speaks today. I think the dividing line in the church is not over spiritual gifts, but it is the whole issue of does God speak? Can we hear his voice?

Now, this issue, this question is being attacked from two directions. On the one hand, the non-believing world, the atheists, the agnostics would say "Where is your God? He doesn't do anything. He doesn't show himself. Your God is no different than no God at all. Yeah, you claim that certain events happened 2000 years ago, but we can call the historical records into question. Where is your God today? Where is the proof of God's existence today?"

And so God's voice is attacked from the end of the spectrum of the atheist and the agnostic. But whether God speaks today is also being attacked by the conservative evangelical wing of the church who suggests that if we allow for God's voice in our lives, we will be adding to the words of Scripture and opening ourselves up to heresy. And I tried to tackle those issues last week.

If you weren't here, I would encourage you to pick up the tape. All of my teaching tapes are available in the bookstore. We are putting out a catalog of teaching tapes so that you can pick up a tape or tape series if you find one of the subjects that I have been teaching on helpful to you or to a friend or family member.

But let's take a look at this question. Today, what I am doing is that I want to answer some of the tough questions that you might have, that you might be asking, about God's voice. Of all the questions that people come in with here at the Vineyard, some of the most frequently asked questions have to do with hearing God's voice, since that is an emphasis here in this church. And so today, I would like to just pull it all together for you and answer some of the tough questions concerning God's voice. But first, let's pray.

I want to first of all deal with the issue of whether God speaks today. Does God speak or are the atheists right that God is in fact inactive? He is virtually non-existent. The difference between the God who never speaks and never acts and no God at all is nothing. So, as a practical matter, there really is no relationship. God may as well not exist because he is so far away. He never talks. What kind of relationship do you have with someone who doesn't speak? The conservative evangelicals would say, "Well, we have letters from God. We have some letters. And we read over his letters and we study his letters. We study what God wrote down in the Bible."

But does God speak today? Well, to answer that let me ask another question. Who, in the Bible, does not speak? What entity? Bible Scholars, who, in the Bible, does not speak? I want you to see this biblically. There is one entity in the Bible that does not speak. Look with me to Psalm 115. Psalm 115:2, the Psalmist says,

"Why do the nations say, 'Where is their God?'" which is what the atheists always say. What is your proof of God? Why should we believe in him if he never speaks?

The Psalmist answers,

"Our God is in heaven. He does whatever pleases him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, they have feet, but cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats."

The entity in the Bible that never speaks, that is always mute, is not God, but idols. False gods, no gods, the gods of the nations—those are the gods that cannot speak and do not speak.

Flip with me to 1 Kings 18. This is the great confrontation between Elijah who was a prophet of God and the prophets of Baal. The people in Elijah's day were following false gods. And so Elijah, in order to call people back to the Lord, sets up this amazing test. He brings together all the prophets of Baal. And in 1 Kings 18:20 it says,

"Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, 'How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.'"

We, often, are wavering between two allegiances—between God and our addiction; between God and another person; between God and our job; between God and our boyfriend or girlfriend. We have two allegiances. And Elijah challenges and confronts this dual allegiance that is in all of our hearts and he says, "How long will you waver between these two opinions, these two allegiances?"

"But the people said nothing. And Elijah said, 'I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put in on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The God who answers by fire, he is God.'"

Who is God? The one who answers. The one who speaks. The text goes on and says that these false prophets were calling on the name of Baal from morning to noon. "Oh Ba-al, [which is how you are supposed to pronounce it], oh Ba-al, answer us' they shouted. But there was no response. No one answered. They danced around the altar that they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them, 'Shout louder. Surely he is a God and is deep in thought or busy or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.' [Some versions say, "Maybe he is going to the bathroom and needs to be called out."] So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears as was their custom until their blood flowed."

This is a pagan ritual, blood-letting and sacrifices. It is the way the Satanists do it now, the way the witches do it in these covens. We are talking about occult practices. And they are calling on their gods.

"Midday passed and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention."

Then when Elijah calls upon the Lord, he says in verse 37, "Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you are the Lord, O Lord our God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

"Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil. It licked up the water in the trenches. And when all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and they cried, 'The Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God.'"

What marks off God from the idols of the world is that God speaks and idols don't. False gods, no gods, non-existent gods don't speak. The Lord speaks. The scriptures say, "He thunders from the heavens. The Lion roars who can but prophesy?" (In the book of Amos) Most of the books in the Bible begin with "The Lord says..." Our God speaks.

And do you know when God stops speaking? Nowhere in the Bible does it say that God stopped speaking after the Bible was finished being written. Do you know when God stops speaking biblically? Only one time. The consistent word from the Bible is that God stops speaking when judgment falls. The time when God stops speaking is when people stop listening, when people close their ears to God, when people harden their hearts to God even though God repeatedly speaks, then as a judgment God stops speaking.

Look with me at Amos 8. In the book of Amos 8:11 the Lord is announcing a judgment on the nation of Israel and he says, "The days are coming [declares the sovereign Lord] when I will send a famine through the land. Not a famine of food or thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it."

Do you understand that the silence of God is a judgment? You know, some conservative Christians are proud of the fact that we don't look around to hear God's voice. God doesn't speak today. Do you understand that if that were true, which it is not as we are going to find out in a moment that it is absolutely false, but if that were true, that would be a judgment? Not a good thing, not something to be proud about and to celebrate in our churches. The silence of God. The silence of God biblically is a horrible thing. The silence of God means that God has decided to cut off communication because from his side, he says it is no longer worth it to talk.

God is like the rest of us. And there comes a time when he says, "I break off negotiations. I break off communication. You won't listen."

And over and over again, the silence of God in the Bible is described as a great judgment. Psalm 74, the Psalmist cries out, "Why have you rejected us forever, O God? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture?" And then he talks about the judgments that are falling on the nation of Israel and the invasions and all of the problems of the nation, the judgment that has come on the Jewish people. But the Psalmist goes on in describing the judgment and he says that part of that judgment is Psalm 74:9, "We are given no miraculous signs, no prophets are left, and none of us knows how long this will be."

You know, people are so proud of the fact that they don't get any miracles and that God has stopped working signs and wonders. And they don't look around to hear the voice of God. That is a judgment, friends. That is not a good thing biblically that God doesn't work miracles. It is a bad thing.

And so the Psalmist asks the Lord, "Lord, as you did in days of old, rise up O Lord, speak again."

There comes a time in the life of a church that the church becomes so hard to hearing God's voice, so hard of hearing, that the Lord stops speaking. And that can happen in the life of an individual, as it did in the life of King Saul in 1 Samuel 28. King Saul continually rebelled against God. He just kept sinning

and sinning. And so finally Saul is looking for a word from the Lord in 1 Samuel 28 and it says in verse 6, "...he inquired of the Lord, but he did not answer him by dreams or by Urim or prophets." And in verse 15 he is involved in this occult activity and Saul confesses what the problem is. He says, "I am in great distress. The Philistines are fighting against me. But God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me either by prophets or by dreams."

The Lord no longer speaks. It is a judgment. This is the consistent teaching of scripture. The silence of God is a sign of his judgment.

And to prove this to you, let me ask you when was God most silent? When in history was God most silent? The Bible says that it was at the cross. Don't you recall the cry of dereliction, the cry of abandonment of Jesus on the cross? In Mark 15 and in Matthew 27 when Jesus echoed the words of the Psalmist, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" He said in Aramaic, "Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani?"

When Jesus took on the sin of the world, so fully identified with us that he became the sinner in the sight of God, so that God judged sin and poured out his wrath on his Son. When Jesus became our substitute and the judgment of God fell on him. What was the sign of that judgment but the awful silence of God? "My God, my God, where are you? Why have you forsaken me? Why have you abandoned me?" Christ lived in communion and in communication with God for eternity. And then that communication was cut off and darkness fell over the land for three hours as God hid himself.

There is nothing more awful than to have God hide himself, to say nothing. Friends, what I am trying to communicate is that this is not a normal state of affairs, when God doesn't speak. This is not a good thing. Some people describe this darkness as the dark night of the soul, this horrible place of walking into the sufferings of Christ to the point that you are just abandoned. There is no voice. There is nothing. This is not what the Bible promises as the consistent place where the Christian lives. Even though many churches teach this, this is not New Testament Christianity. New Testament Christianity proceeds out of the new covenant, which if you will turn with me to Acts 2, the new covenant is all about God striking a deal with us through the Holy Spirit to talk with us.

Acts 2:17, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people."

And the result of the Holy Spirit coming is that God speaks. "Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, those men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days and they will prophesy."

People will hear God's voice because that is normal Christianity.

You say, "Rich, Rich, if I don't hear his voice, does that mean I am being judged?"

I didn't say that. I said that if God doesn't speak that is a sign of judgment. There are some reasons why even if God is speaking many of us can't hear. One major reason why we do not hear God's voice is frankly we do not understand how God's voice comes. We do not expect it. Especially in the ways that it does come. God's voice comes in a most surprising way. When someone talks of God speaking today, what we expect is a burning bush experience. We

are walking along and the bush is burning and we hear an audible voice. So, if I say, "Well, God said to me" what we hear from that is the Lord said, "Rich?"

And I said, "Yes, God."

He said, "Rich, I would like you to do the following. Take out a red pen and write this down. No, that marker is a bit maroon, I would like you take out a red pen."

We think that God's voice comes audibly, that it is absolutely crystal clear, that it is not at all mysterious or fuzzy or could not be called into question. Part of the reason we have a problem with God's voice is that we have in mind what we receive and the way God's voice comes is not what we expect.

Flip with me to Numbers 12. In Numbers 12 Aaron and Miriam are attacking their brother, Moses, and God tells Aaron and Miriam how people generally hear his voice, the normal way people hear his voice and then how he speaks to Moses by way of contrast. And the Lord says in Numbers 12:6,

"Listen to my words: When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant, Moses; he is faithful in all my house. When I speak to him, I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles. He sees the form of the Lord."

See, the difference between Moses and everyone else is that Moses got it clear. The rest of us get God's word, God's voice in riddles. We hear it in dreams. Is there anything more confusing than a dream? We get it in puzzles and in indistinct ways.

And that is confirmed by the way in the book of Job because it says in Job 33:14, "God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it." We don't get it. We are expecting a burning bush. We are expecting a Moses experience. And Job tells us how we are likely going to get the voice of God. "In a dream, in a vision of the night when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings....Or a man may be chastened on a bed of pain." The Lord speaks through pain. He speaks through warnings. He speaks indistinctly.

I love one of the statements that a teacher named David Parker made when he came here and was teaching on the subject of intercession and God's voice. He said regarding this whole issue of expectation and why we miss God's voice. He said, "You know, when God said that he would feed the children of Israel in the desert, probably what they had in mind was a loaf of hot French bread right out of the oven with warm melted butter on it. He would drop loaves of French bread right from sky. And instead, they got manna. Do you know what manna literally means? It is the Hebrew word, "Man-na" it means "What's this?"

And that is what we say today when God speaks to us. We say, "What's this? This couldn't be God, this dream, this impression, this little thought. What's this? Man-na?"

We miss the voice of God because it comes indistinctly. Very often it is by way of a fleeting thought, an impression, a picture in your mind's eye, a dream that has a certain weight to it that really speaks to you.

And another reason why we miss the voice of God is not only because it comes by way of a surprising method, but because the voice of God is usually a surprising message. Have you ever noticed how surprised people in the Bible

are with the messages that God gives them? I mean no one expects it. No one says, "Of course, I already thought that, Lord."

You know, when the Lord speaks to Moses about going to Pharaoh or to Gideon about attacking the Midianite army, or to Mary, he says, "O, by the way, you are a virgin, but you are going to have a child." She didn't say, "But of course, that makes a lot of sense." The message of the Lord is often very surprising. We are looking for, "Jim, you will be the next Billy Graham, only greater." And the Lord comes along and says, "Jim, you need to clean out the dishwasher for your wife tonight." "You need to shut the television off." "Diane, you need to stop gossiping. Watch your anger."

In both method and message, the word of the Lord is an unexpected thing, a surprising thing. And do you know why we can't fundamentally hear God's voice even when he is speaking? I, fundamentally, believe that most people can't hear God's voice because we don't believe God loves us enough to want to speak to us.

Turn with me to John 5:19-20 where Jesus is talking about his relationship with God, his Father. And Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He can only do what he sees the Father doing because whatever the Father does, the Son also does."

I remember reading that and being just cut to the heart that Jesus Christ himself couldn't do anything by himself that would make a difference for the kingdom of God. That would produce anything for God. But he only did what he saw his Father doing. He only did what he was responding to by hearing God's voice. I remember reading that and saying to God, "You know, God, where does that leave me? I mean I never hear your voice. If Jesus could only do what he saw you doing and he just ministered out of a response to you, God, and followed your lead, I never know what you are doing. I never feel your leading. I am just off doing my own thing most of the time. Why don't I hear your voice, God?"

I felt the Lord say, "Rich, read verse 20."

And verse 20 says, "For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does."

And God spoke to my heart and said, "Rich, the problem is not with your ears. The problem is with your heart. You don't believe that I love you enough to talk to you."

See, friends, I think that is where many of you are at this morning. You have drawn a circle that is really small regarding the love of God and you are outside that circle. That because of who you are, the way you are wired, what you have done, your sin, your particular issues, God won't talk to you. And I remember being before God and having him speak that word about not feeling loved and it occurred to me that I thought in my mind that because I was analytical, that I analyzed things and reasoned things through that God could never get through to me with a brain like mine, that I had to be artistic, a go-with-the-flow kind of person. I thought I was so defective somehow that he couldn't get through to me, even though, of course, he created me and made me this way.

We have a running joke in the office. We have an artist, Holly, who works on our graphics. She always shows me what she is doing and she says, "How

do you like it?" Initially, I used to say, "Well, I don't get it. I don't understand it. What are you trying to do?" She would say, "Well, I don't know what I am trying to do, you just have to feel it."

So, in the last six months or so, whenever she shows me something and she says, "How do you like it?" I just take it and rub it on my chest. I say, "Oh, I don't know, I am not going to give you what I think about this, but oh, it feels so wonderful."

Well, God spoke to me that day and told me that my issue was that I didn't believe that he could love someone like me. And I literally saw a circle being drawn on the ground and the Lord said, "Rich, you need to choose to step into that circle. You need to step in."

And, friends, when I step into the circle of God's love by a choice, when I say that I am going to believe the written word of God, that God loves me even though I feel defective, that opens up God's voice to me and I do hear better and I do get impressions. I do get visions. I do get prophetic words. I have had dreams. But I must feel loved. And some of that, at least for me, is a choice of repenting from a false view.

Now, there is one more reason why we don't hear God's voice and that is, frankly, we don't slow down enough to have a relationship with God. You know, the world celebrates activism, busyness. Busyness is the great idol of our culture. We are too busy to talk to each other. We are too busy for friendships. We are too busy for relationships. The average American works more hours than any other person in the western world. Did you know that? We are racing so fast that we can't eat dinner with our families. We have no time to talk. No time to sit. No time to reflect. At least we think we don't. And we carry that into Christianity. We think that what God fundamentally wants from us is a lot of activity.

God wants a relationship. You can't hear God's voice anymore than you can hear your children's voice, if you don't slow down long enough to listen. If you don't take your head out of the newspaper or away from a project or away from cleaning up or away from what you are doing for God to have God talk. Activism quenches the voice of God.

Which leads to the next question: When does God speak? And you know biblically the most frequent time that God speaks is in the morning? Some of you are saying, "Great, I hate getting up in the morning." Actually the Bible says that he also speaks at night. But very often the Bible says that God speaks in the morning. For example in Isaiah 50:4-5, Isaiah says, "The sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning. He wakens my ear to listen like one being taught."

In the Psalms we see the Psalmist frequently crying out to God in the morning. Psalm 5:3, "In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice. In the morning, I lay my requests before you and I wait in expectation."

You know something? Here in this church we really, really encourage people to set aside time each day to meet with God alone. I am not talking about family devotions. I am not talking about shooting up a quick one while you are in your car on the way to work. I mean set aside some time—20 minutes, a half an hour, to read your Bible (we handed out those reading guides last week), and to

pray, but then to listen. “Lord, what do you want to say to me? What is your heart?” Ask God some questions that frequently will provoke an answer as it does in the Bible.

And I am amazed by folks response to taking some time with God and setting that aside as a habit, as a discipline, each morning. There are many, many people who object to a regular time set aside with God and they say, “That is legalism.” People say that it is legalism to have a time when you are going to meet with God. You know, those same people have no problem setting aside a regular time to eat dinner. We have no problem feeding our bodies at the same time each day. We don’t call that legalism. We have no problem taking a shower at the same time each day. We have no problems with other habits of life that we do at the same time. We go to work at the same time. We read the newspaper at the same time. It is only when it comes to our relationship with God that we have a problem forming certain good habits.

Well, frankly, I think that is a tactic of the enemy to keep us from meeting with God. And if you are going to meet with the Lord in the morning, you probably will need to go to bed just a little bit earlier so that you can get up. And you may need to cut one or two of your morning activities and postpone them to evening—like reading the paper or like doing all of your chores.

Of course, there is no magic to hearing in the morning and if having time in the morning is simply impossible, meet with God over lunch. Close your office door and meet with God. Or when you kids are napping, meet with God. Or meet with God when you have a set time in the evening.

But God speaks to us in the morning and when we slow down enough to relate to God. And God also speaks to us in pain and in our distress.

You know, over and over again people in the Bible are spoken to in distress, in what I call failure. The great painful experience of life is failure. Have you failed recently? Some of you surely have failed. Maybe you failed to maintain your standards, something you believe in deeply, but you failed to live up to your own standards, your own moral standards. And you are profoundly disappointed in your eyes with what you have done. You failed. Maybe you failed in one of your relationships so that you feel like a failure because of how your children have behaved. You know, our children can be embarrassments to us and can hurt us as we can hurt our children and be an embarrassment to them. And we can feel like failures because of one of our kids and their behavior. We can feel like failures because of the way we have been evaluated as we are looked at through the eyes of someone else. They can communicate to us that we are failures.

Maybe in your case, it is just one of your expectations regarding what you thought God was going to do. What you thought that God was going to open up, and God has not opened that up. And so you feel like you have failed.

In any case, friends, failure of all kinds is one of the times that you will be able to hear God best. In failure, if you will simply turn to God and say, “God, what is it that you are trying to teach me? What is it that you are saying to me?” the Lord will speak. If you don’t run away from the pain, if you don’t get angry with God, if you don’t sink into despair because I will tell you what God is not saying to you, God is not saying to you in failure, “I hate you and I have a horrible

plan for your life, that's what I am saying." That voice comes from the enemy. God is never saying to you, "I hate you and I have a horrible plan for your life."

But when you fail to measure up in some way and you feel the pain of that, if you will bring that to God and if you will say to God, "God, what is it that you are saying to me in this?" The Lord will speak. Sometimes his message will be very simple, "You need to trust me. Believe that I am in control."

Sometimes the Lord will speak to you about your competitiveness and the reason why you feel like you have failed. You know, one of the great trials of life is in enjoying the success of someone else with whom we are competing. Have you ever been tested by that one? You are all the time, by the way, whether you realize it or not. But there is always someone in our lives with whom we are competing or someone will mention another who is succeeding more than we are. It may be a girl in your class who is more popular than you. It may be someone who you grew up with whose house is bigger than yours and who is doing better in his career. It may be another musician who got to play in a band or on the worship team when you wanted that part. It may be someone in ministry who is just more successful than you are, is better known and more often spoken about.

There are very few things that try us as much as watching someone with whom we are competing succeed and then to try to enjoy their success. In fact, most often we suspect that someone else's success have been gotten illegally. We have loads of reasons why someone else would be ahead of us. And they are almost always bad. Well, they got that position based on who they know. They have succeeded because they cut corners. God may speak to you about your competitiveness.

God speaks in conversion. No one is converted without having the word of God pierce them. One of the times in your life that you may be able to pick up the voice of God is as you look back on the moment that you were saved. I have heard some amazing stories in this church about how God spoke to people in bringing them to salvation. One guy in the church was spoken to through the radio, through a song. He was driving home and this song began playing on the radio and he said that God just began to speak to him and just opened him up through that song and where his whole life was. He met God in his car. It wasn't being witnessed to. It wasn't like he was in the middle of a religious meeting. The Lord just used a song to talk to him.

The great Augustine was a guy who was a sexual addict, involved in all kinds of immoral behavior. He was in his room one day wrestling with the existence of God and how to have a relationship with God. Some children were playing in the garden below and had this little song, one of which said, "Take and read, take and read, take and read..." He happened to have an open Bible and when he heard those children singing, "Take and read" he looked down to his open Bible and his open Bible said, "The night is nearly over, the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently in the day time, not in orgies or in drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy, rather clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desire of your flesh. That scripture verse spoke to him and he was converted.

The Lord will speak to some of you even today and say, “Now is the time for you to give yourself to Christ.”

To whom does God speak? Over and over in the Bible, God speaks to people who are forgiven and cleansed of their sins. This is the new covenant, friends. In Jeremiah 31, Jeremiah says, “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time. This is the new covenant [listen to this], I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother saying, ‘Know the Lord’ because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest.”

People will hear God’s voice echoing in their hearts. Why?

Verse 34: “For I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sins no more.”

God speaks to the forgiven, to people whose hearts have been freed up from the guilt of their past actions, people who have gotten the log jam blown away. That place where there is a wall in your heart that says, “I am locked in to my past and to my failure and to my sin.” That has to be blown out. The voice of God comes to the forgiven.

Earlier I said that you must feel loved by God, believing that you are in the circle. Well, I will tell you that you also must feel forgiven by God. If you are tied to your past, tied to your failures, tied to your sins, you won’t be able to hear the voice of the Lord. What you will hear will be the voice of accusation. The voice of judgment, the voice of failure—that has to be washed away. God speaks to the forgiven.

God speaks to the obedient. The great cause of missing God’s voice is that you and I have our plans in place and we won’t submit our plans to God. But the more you obey what you are hearing, the more God will speak, the more his voice will open up to you. Jesus says in Mark 4, “Be careful how you hear. With the measure you use it will be measured to you and even more.”

You know, the measure we use is the scope of how open we are to what God says. A big measure is I am open to all that God says and I am willing to put it all into practice. Well, God is going to use that big measure then to scoop out his word to you. He will use a big measuring cup and dump it on you. If you are open to more of what God is saying to you, God talks to you about giving, God talks to you about spending time alone with him in the mornings, God talks to you about your attitudes or your competitiveness or your need for forgiveness. If you are open to what God is saying, he is going to scoop out more. A small measure means that you are closed to much of what God would say to you about your relationship with your spouse. You can’t hear it. You are closed to much correction through others. You can’t hear it. You are closed to God’s voice through your kids or God’s voice through teaching. You don’t want to hear it. Well, then, God will dole out his voice to you in very little measure. God gives his voice to the forgiven and God gives his voice to the obedient to those who are open to it and who put it into practice.

He gives his voice to us, mainly, for our personal benefit. You know, most of what God wants to say is not how you will correct others, how you will challenge others. Most of God’s voice is going to be the Holy Spirit specifically applying the Bible to your life. That is mostly what you will hear from God, the

Lord specifically applying the Bible. He specifically applies the Great Commission to your life and says, "If you are going to be a follower of Jesus, it is not enough for you to sit and listen to a message. You need to go and tell someone else about Christ. You need to be a bringer to church, an inviter. You need to include other people in your life and spread the kingdom. The Lord is going to speak to you and say, "Well, here is your chance. Go and do it."

Most of the voice of God will be God speaking to you about you. Do you know the result of being open to the voice of God, taking time with the Lord, praying over things when you say, "God is this you? What do you want? What are you saying?" You know, the main result for you personally to being open to God's voice, the main result for you will be freedom. The word of God sets us free when we hear it and obey it. It sets you free from your bondage to all of the slogans and all of the opinions and all the advertisements and fashions of this culture. You can be free from having to conform yourself to the opinions and the fashions of this world. The only way to break free from being dominated by all the garbage that you are constantly being sold through advertising, through marketing, through the media, through other people, through your parents, the only way to be free is to be responsive to the voice of God. Otherwise you are a slave.

The world tells you that the best thing you can do with your life is to acquire. God comes along and speaks in your ear and says that the best thing you can do with your life is give it away. The world tells you that your body and what you do with your body is your business. God comes along and speaks in your ear and says, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. And what you do with your body is my business."

The world says that if you have a problem, or you are in pain, or you fail that will destroy you. You have to avoid all pain and all problems and all failure because you will be destroyed by that. God comes along and says, "Let me let you in on a little secret. Pain and problems and failure don't destroy you, they can develop you."

The world says to you, "Your will be done." And God comes along and says, "No. God's will be done."

Do you understand that as you respond to the voice of God, you can be set free from the bondage that you live under now to every one else's opinion or to your own opinion in itself?

We not only gain freedom, but we gain the ability to be a life giving person, a life giving source instead of a drain.

I want to finish with Isaiah 50:4-5:

"The sovereign Lord has given me an instructive tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught."

Can you be a life giving source to the weary, to people who are discouraged? Do you have the word for the person who is bowed down? All around you people are thirsty. People are in need. Do you feel like you have what it takes to sustain them? You won't have what it takes; you yourself will be in need. You will be empty and worn out by their weariness if you haven't been listening to the word of God.

Friends, you can be a life giving fountain. You can be the kind of person that people want to talk to, the kind of person that people want to get near, instead of being a drain. If you will open yourself up to responding, to listening to God's word in scripture, take time with him, you will have the word that will sustain the weary. Let's Pray.