



Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church
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God Speaks

John 8:42-47; 10:1-4, 14-15, 27-30; 16:12-15;
Isaiah 30:19-21; 55:6-13; Hebrews 1:1-3

Does God still speak to His people?

We often get very uncomfortable when we hear someone say that God spoke to them, don't we? After all, many times people who say that make outrageous claims about what God has supposedly said. And sometimes they do things that we know God would never have told them to do.

But just because *some* people make false claims about it is no reason to dismiss the concept of God speaking to us, is it? In fact, if God doesn't speak to His people, we're in a terrible mess!

The good news is that He does indeed speak, and if we'll listen carefully, He'll speak to us!

That's what we're focusing on this morning—the fact that *God speaks*. As we continue our journey through the themes of Henry Blackaby's study, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*,¹ we come to the fourth of what Blackaby calls the "Seven Realities of Experiencing God": *God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways*.

Our text this morning consists of all the Scriptures we have read in our service so far today, along with these three passages from the Gospel of John: **John 8:42-47; 10:1-4, 14-15, 27-30; 16:12-15**. Listen carefully to what Jesus said in these passages . . . **READ TEXT . . .**

To whom does God speak?

When we think about God speaking, one question that immediately comes to mind is this: *Whom does He speak to?*

The passages from John 8 and 10 help us with that. Jesus stated clearly to the Jews that *those who belong to God hear what God says*.

In chapter 8, the Jewish leaders were disputing the validity of Jesus' testimony and His identity. Jesus turned the conversation to a discussion of their heritage and identity. They claimed to be children of Abraham; then they claimed to be children of God.

Jesus stated that the devil was their father, because if they belonged to God, they would hear God speaking in Jesus, *since those who belong to God hear what He says*.

In chapter 10, Jesus described Himself as the good shepherd. He said that as the good shepherd, He knows His sheep, and they know Him and recognize His voice and follow Him!

¹ In this sermon series, I am relying heavily on Blackaby's ideas as presented in Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

So these passages in John clearly show us that *God speaks to those who belong to Him*.

This was true in Biblical times (both in the Old Testament and the New Testament). God spoke to Abraham, to Moses, to the prophets, to Jesus, to the disciples, to the early church, to Paul, and to others as well. The one thing they all had in common was that *they belonged to God*.

As Blackaby describes it, the pattern ran something like this:²

- God spoke, often in a unique way . . .
- They knew it was God speaking . . .
- They knew what He was saying . . .

God speaks to us because we belong to Him. We who belong to Him hear His voice. And we learn to recognize His voice as we grow in our love relationship with Him. No method or formula can substitute for this relationship!

It's not a matter of looking for signs, or the prosperity gospel's name it and claim it approach, or even looking for open or closed doors.

We hear Him and recognize His voice *as we know Him!*

It's a lot like the communication between a husband and wife. The better they get to know each other, the better and more deeply they communicate.

Now when God speaks to us, we should respond immediately. We've had an encounter with God, and He has spoken with a purpose. He's up to something—there's something He's wanting to do in us or through us.

It may be simply deepening our relationship with Him. Or He might be preparing us for something He's about to do, so He's developing our character to match the assignment He's going to give us.

God *always* speaks at the *right* time. And He'll give us directions that are as specific as they need to be for how He's leading us.

As we learn God's word and ways, and as we get to know Him personally, we'll be better able to recognize when He is speaking!

Why does God speak?

Okay, so God speaks to those who belong to Him. But *why does God speak?*

Earlier in our service we heard a passage read from Isaiah 55. In that passage, the prophet called the people to repentance, declaring that God's ways and thoughts were not humanity's ways and thoughts, and that God's word was certain and would accomplish His purpose of delivering His people from exile in Babylon and bringing glory to Himself.

Through this message, God revealed Himself as faithful, merciful, and forgiving. He also revealed His purpose to deliver the people from exile in Babylon. And He made it clear that His ways and thoughts were totally different from and far above humanity's ways and thoughts.

In Isaiah 30:19-21, Isaiah declared that even though Israel was disobedient, when they turned to the Lord He would hear them and help them. He would speak to them to guide them in His ways.

So in these passages from Isaiah, God declared His purpose to deliver those who would seek Him and His ways. What does that mean for us today?

² Blackaby and King, 84-86.

These passages teach us that *God speaks to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways to His people.*

He speaks *to reveal Himself.* We can't discover God's character on our own because of His transcendence and our sinfulness. What we know of God is what He reveals to us!

Revelation means "unveiling." Through God's dealings with Abram, Moses, and in Christ, God reveals Himself—who He is and what He is like. We see Him most clearly in His revelation in Christ, as the writer of Hebrews described it in the passage we read at the beginning of our service today (Hebrews 1:1-3).

God reveals His name, which helps us believe. He reveals His nature and His character, which helps us know how to respond, and His very self, which strengthens our faith and leads us to action.

He also speaks *to reveal His purposes.* God always speaks with a purpose in mind. He never talks in idle chatter or just to hear Himself. His purpose has to do with our relationship with Him and with His kingdom!

He spoke to Noah about preserving a remnant of humans and animals in the coming flood. He spoke to Abram, whom He later named Abraham, about how He would take a people for Himself from Abraham's descendants—at a time when Abraham and his wife Sarah were already old and still childless!

You see, the issue when God speaks is never really our plans. It's God's purposes!

God also speaks *to reveal His ways.* His purposes will only be accomplished through His ways. When we try to accomplish things our way, we don't see God's power at work, even if some good things happen. When God accomplishes His purposes in His way, it's clear that *He* has done it!

So whether it's Gideon conquering the whole Midianite army with just 300 soldiers, or Jesus feeding the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, or a host of other ways, it becomes clear it's God at work. And through that revelation, people come to know Him, and He is glorified.

How does God speak?

So God speaks to those who belong to Him to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.

But *how does God speak?*

There are a host of passages we could look to on this question. The passage we read earlier from John 16:12-15 is one of them. In it, *Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would make His word and will known to His disciples.*

So understand this, and don't let it scare you: *God speaks to us by the Holy Spirit.* All the prophetic activity in the early church that we read about in Acts and the letters and the book of Revelation and in early church history was understood to take place *by the Spirit.* The entire New Testament makes it clear that God speaks through His Spirit.

Now because our old fallen nature is still with us, we need some checks and balances to discern whether it is the *Holy Spirit* speaking to us. First John 4:1ff instructs us to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (ESV). What the Spirit says will always be consistent with two things: (1) the Scriptural record of how God has revealed Himself, and (2) the historic apostolic witness about Jesus.

So how does God speak to us? He can and does speak in many ways, often uniquely. But there are some primary ways we can look to: *God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church.* Think about that for a minute.

God speaks *through the Bible,* as the Spirit illuminates our minds as we read and study

Scripture. He may use a particular passage that almost seems to jump off the page at us.

But we have to be careful here. We don't want to be like the man who was looking for help and decided to open the Bible and take whatever his eyes fell on as a word from God. His eyes fell on the passage that says, "Judas went out and hung himself." He didn't like that, so he decided to try again. This time his eyes fell on the verse that says, "Go, and do likewise."

God also speaks by the Spirit *through prayer*, as in our relationship with Him we commune and converse with Him. We learn to recognize his voice in our prayers. When we yield to Him, the Spirit will guide us in our prayers, even praying for us when we don't know how or what to pray (Romans 8:26-27).

It's important that as we pray, we watch to see what God does. As Blackaby says, it's important to make the connection between our prayers and what happens next. And if God gives us something different than what we asked for, we must respond to God by adjusting our lives to it. The fact is that He may be giving us even more!

God often speaks *through circumstances* as well. As we learn to view our circumstances from God's perspective, we'll often hear Him speak to us in their midst. And as we're seeking His response in a matter, He may sometimes use past providential circumstances as spiritual markers to show us the direction He's been leading us in all along. We shouldn't trust circumstances alone in discerning God's voice, but they are an important component. And when we're trusting Him with all our heart, not relying on our own insight, and acknowledging Him in all our ways, we can be confident that He will make our paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Along with Scripture, prayer, and circumstances, God speaks by His Spirit *through the church*, through other believers. According to Paul in Ephesians 4:1-16, the church is the body of Christ. And all its members are important and necessary. This is particularly true in knowing God's will for the body.

Blackaby uses the image of walking down the train tracks to describe how this works. The eyes don't see the train, but the ears hear its horn and the feet feel its rumble, so the body knows to get off the tracks!

Our Spiritual Directions Forums will take this truth that the Holy Spirit speaks through the body very seriously. These forums will be opportunities for the members of the body to share what they've been hearing from God about particular areas in the life of our church—not our own personal preferences, but about how we believe God is telling us He wants us to fulfill our mission and vision that He has given to us.

Sometimes God may speak through another individual believer to get us thinking in a direction, or to confirm what He's been saying to us in other ways.

I think that Blackaby is right when he says that when all four of these line up—what we hear God saying in Scripture, in our prayers, through our circumstances, and through other believers—we can proceed with confidence.

Make no mistake, brothers and sisters—*God speaks* to His people, and He does so *by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church*.

Maybe one reason so many Christians and churches today are languishing is that we don't really *expect* to hear God speak. I mean, if we're honest, *do we?*

But as we nurture our individual and corporate relationship with God, we'll learn more fully and deeply by experience what Jesus meant when He said, "My sheep hear my voice."

Listen, friends! *God is speaking!*

†MEG