

Listening to the Voice of God

“For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God”
(Acts 20:27).

What comes to mind when you think of pastors, evangelists and Bible teachers? These are people who preach and teach the Word of God. Being a man of God is not just about preaching or speaking. In order to speak, “Thus saith the Lord” the preacher must first listen to God. It is a big problem when preachers do not take time to hear God’s voice. What a tragedy when they speak what people want to hear instead of what God directs.

The counsel of the Holy Spirit cannot be replaced with the opinions of others. Preachers should never preach sermons designed to appease certain sections of the church. They yield to the Holy Spirit and speak what God has placed in their hearts.

Before preaching a sermon, a question should be asked. “Is God leading me to preach this?” When members come to church on Sunday they expect to hear what God said to the preacher during the week.

God Speaks to Preachers

The word “speak” is recorded over 500 times in the *King James Version*. Many references concern things that God told men to say. How did they know what God wanted them to speak? First they had to hear or listen. Seven times Revelation records, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22).

The phrase, “Thus saith the Lord” is recorded 414 times; the “Lord said,” 221 times; “God said,” 46 times. From this we learn that God speaks to His people. The question is, “Do His people still listen?”

- “And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream” (Numbers 12:6).
- “And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Exodus 33:11).
- “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).
- “And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12).

God taught Elijah that His voice is not always heard in the loud noises of an earthquake, a storm, or a fire. He often speaks in a still, small voice. God desires to make Himself known in soft whisperings to an attentive servant.

Preachers Listen and Speak God's Word

- “And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD hath put in my mouth?” (Numbers 23:12).
- “If any man have an ear, let him hear” (Revelation 13:9).
- “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:1-4).

Paul spoke the testimony of God. How did He know God's testimony? He listened to God. His determination to know Jesus Christ exceeded other things in his life. Because Paul listened and obeyed God's specific instructions God's Spirit and power were demonstrated in his ministry.

“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).

One of the purposes of prophecy is to reveal the testimony of Jesus. Preaching reveals what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Many times preaching contains an element of prophecy. The ultimate end of prophecy is making known the divine will of God.

Do Not Bend the Truth

“Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following” (Acts 20:30, *NLT*).

One desire of the times is for flattering prophets to tell people what they want to hear. Preachers should not become truth-benders. Even a novice preacher knows types of messages that will quickly gain the approval and response of the hearers. Many include revival (but not repentance), prosperity (but not sacrifice, suffering, or faithfulness), victory over Satan (but not submission to the Lord's Word), and liberty (but not holiness). We must avoid conforming to the times, preaching smooth things to itching ears but staying away from personal responsibility, private sins, and shortcomings.

Paul charged Timothy, “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when

men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:2-4, *NIV*).

An Ancient Story that Still Talks

Jehoshaphat was a good king who tried to teach the people God's Word. He wanted to remain faithful to the Lord. He became a friend and partner to Ahab who wanted to go up in battle against Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat acknowledged God in all his ways (Proverbs 3:6) and inquired at God's Word.

He insisted, "Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today" (2 Chronicles 18:4). He was not willing to proceed until this is done. Pleasing prophets tell them exactly what they wanted to hear. However, Jehoshaphat, not content, asked, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?" (Verse 6).

Ahab responded, "There is yet one man, by whom we may inquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil" (verse 7).

Matthew Henry suggests Ahab "preferred those that humoured him before a good prophet that gave him fair warnings of his danger." He adds, "that counsel is not always best for us that is most pleasing to us."

Finally despite Ahab's disapproval, Micaiah is called.

"And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake to him, saying, Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one assent; let thy word therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good. And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak" (2 Chronicles 18:12-13).

Micaiah is not intimidated into conforming to what other prophets said. The messenger basically advised, "Let your word be like everyone else's. Speak favorably about the king's success." He spoke what the Lord tells him to speak. (Warning: Speaking what God speaks may be costly and hazardous to your health.) Micaiah is rejected, thrown into prison, condemned to a diet of bread and water. As he sat in prison perhaps he felt the joy of humble obedience to the Lord. His prophecy came to pass; Ahab died in battle. Jehoshaphat is later rebuked (2 Chronicles 19:2) for his association with Ahab, an enemy of God. He learned, "Believers should not associate with the ungodly if in that relationship the cause of unrighteousness is advanced, our commitment to God is jeopardized, or the truth of God's Word is compromised." (Donald Stamps, *Full Life Study Bible*)

What is in this story for you? Listen to God. Speak only what God tells you to speak. Then you will have the satisfaction of doing what God has told you to do. The response is in God's hands (and with those who hear you). Rest in the knowledge that you have humbly, and diligently obeyed your Master. You have declared the whole counsel of God.

Study Questions

1. What does Acts 20:27 say? _____

2. Before preaching a sermon the preacher should ask himself what? _____

3. What message is recorded seven times in the Book of Revelation? _____

4. God speaks to His people. What, then, is the question? _____

5. How did God speak to Elijah in 1 Kings 19? _____

6. How did God not speak to Elijah in 1 Kings 19? What does this teach us? _____

7. What should preachers speak, according to Numbers 23:12? _____

8. According to Amos 3:7, God does nothing without first revealing it to His _____

9. According to 1 Corinthians 2:1, what did Paul declare? _____

10. According to Revelation 19:10, what is the spirit of prophecy? _____

11. What type of messages would quickly gain the approval and response of the hearers?

12. What did Paul charge Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2-4? _____

13. What can we learn from the story of Micaiah found in 2 Chronicles 18? _____

14. What did Jehoshaphat learn from his association with Ahab? _____

15. What satisfaction does a preacher get when he speaks what God tells him to speak?
