

Hear Him

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Matthew 17:4-5

Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

I'm amazed at how much I can know something to be true but not experience it. This has become increasingly real to me in the last few weeks. I can know something be true but that knowledge not necessarily be reality. I know the Great Wall of China exists but I have not taken one step of its 5,500-mile length. I have seen pictures of the Via Dolorosa where the Lord walked bearing His cross, but I have not walked in His steps with my own. I've heard of the pyramids of Egypt and know they exist, but I have not looked upon them nor explored their inner chambers. I know about them but I have not experienced them. Have you yet discovered this fact also, that you yourself can know something, believe something, and embrace something and still not experience it?

But what pains me most is not that I have not experienced these amazing wonders of this world but that I have not experienced more of my amazing God. The older I get the more I feel indicted that by this time I should know much more. I realize and catch myself having a real experience with Jesus and then an hour goes by and I have not thought about Him and even worse I have not consulted Him for my actions and decisions. I simply did what I thought was best.

The three apostles of our text, Peter, James, and John were given an astonishing glimpse into one of the most incredible occurrences in Jesus' life. They witnessed the transfiguration of Christ. They witnessed something out of this world, literally. But as marvelous as that event was they did not experience it for what it really was. Having ears they did not hear and having eyes they did not see.

All they could see was a most unique Man with the most unusual access to God. They did believe Him to be the Son of God but they still did not understand His deity and even less did they un-

derstand His coming death and resurrection. Mark says that after this experience He told them to speak no more about it on what they had seen until He had been resurrected from the dead. Mark says the three questioned, “What the rising from the dead meant.” No understanding, no reality about what the Lord had spoken to them about His death and resurrection. And it wasn’t the first time He had talked about it either.

They could hear His voice but they couldn’t hear it. I’m not trying to employ double talk here nor am I trying to be clever—they literally heard the voice of God but could not really hear it for what it said. Surely, you know what I am talking about. We don’t stand in judgment of these three men. You hear God’s word and it registers, you can get some comprehension, but it makes no impact. What God intended you to hear, you didn’t.

Why does that happen? That’s what I want to address today. But before I do, I have a slight disclaimer to make.

Some are debating in this time whether God speaks to an individual subjectively, meaning outside of the written revelation of God’s Word. I’m not here to extend that debate; you all know where I stand on that. But for discussion’s sake this morning, let us say that all of God’s revelation is within His Word and that He does not speak subjectively anymore. Let us grant that argument. I would still say to you and me that even though we have the Word of God and read it, we often do not hear it. We can hear someone proclaim the Word of God to us faithfully, accurately, and contextually, grammatically, and historically correct and still not hear what God says. It doesn’t matter if you think God speaks only through the objective written Word or if you also believe He can speak to you personally in a subjective way, we are hard of hearing most often to the voice of God. Why is that?

Let me offer four reasons from the text.

I. WE CAN’T HEAR GOD BECAUSE WE CAN ONLY HEAR OUR OWN VOICE

So often our voice drowns out the voice of God. There are a thousand voices competing for your attention every day through television, internet, family, friends, co-workers; there are myriads of voices from different perspectives vying, fighting, for your attention. God will not compete for your attention and why should He? He’s the Lord God. He made you. He shouldn’t have to com-

pete with all of these other voices. Therefore, when God speaks and your ear is not attuned to His voice as you're reading His Word and your heart is not truly spiritually attentive, you will not hear God. The reason is because normally your voice speaks louder than His voice. Even when the Word of God is being studied, meditated, heard, it goes through the human intellect, which is mixed with your own consciousness. So, as I've said so many times, when God speaks He uses your own consciousness, your own voice, it sounds like you. I see this here in the text as well. Peter had a problem. He couldn't hear what God had just said in what he witnessed because all he could do was hear what he thought was best.

Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (Matthew 17:4)

Immediately Peter knew what was best. He knew what needed to be done. He knew exactly how to respond to something like this. "We need to build some temples. We need to build some tabernacles, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. That's what we'll do. And Lord, if You'll be pleased to grant my request we'll get to construction immediately." Isn't that the way we often pray? No wonder we don't hear God's answer. *Lord, this is what I believe. This is what I'm asking You for. This is what I think I need to do for You. Would You bless, would You sign off on it?* It's hard to hear God when you're introducing to Him your plans. When you bring to the Lord your ideas and what He needs to do to help you do His will, He tends to grow silent. The problem is we're not able to hear what God is saying to us because we're so focused on hearing what we believe ought to be done in the situation.

How many times have you asked the Lord to do *this* one thing and you wanted it so badly that all you could think of in regards to prayer was God doing this thing for you? Did it ever occur to you that God might have a different idea or plan? So often we cannot hear the Word of the Lord because we have not done what is necessary to hear God speak through His Word by His Spirit and that is to say no to ourselves. Die to that self-impulse that wants to be in control. As long as you desire control, you cannot hear the voice of God. He does not compete with your authority. He will let us have our will and way until we come to the conclusion that our will and way is not right, and until then you cannot hear the voice of God speaking to you.

I would like to say to those who are perhaps not yet His disciples, you who are not yet following Him, you can know God is speaking to you. I'm assured of that. I can look back before I was

converted and there were moments I knew God was doing something, I sensed God working internally and yet I couldn't hear Him. You can hear God, perhaps even as I'm speaking at this very moment. You are hearing God and something is happening on the inside of you, you know it's God but you can't perceive, comprehend, understand what is being said to you. Something inside you tells you it's the Lord but something inside you also says you cannot be a Christian; you cannot give Christ your life because He would be a hard taskmaster. So you give that voice more authority than the voice of God.

You believe the lie and think, "I don't want to serve the Lord because serving Him would be difficult and miserable." This is often what people think about serving Jesus. They think if you serve the Lord and become a Christian you need to get ready for a hard and difficult and miserable life. Let me tell you that voice is a lie. God is the God of all pleasure. Jesus is the most joyful being in the universe. He said to His disciples, "My joy I give to you." If Jesus was not the most joyful person that Peter, James, and John knew, then when He said, "My joy I give to you," and do you think they would want it? Do you think they wanted to follow a sad sack or be eager to have the joy of the Lord if He was a miserable person? He was not a miserable person. He was full of joy. Yet He was also acquainted with grief and sorrow.

I think one of the reasons we don't see many pictures of Jesus smiling in paintings and portraits—of course, no one knows what He looked like—is because how could you actually portray the radiance of that blessed face when He was expressing that joy? I don't think you could capture that. That's one of the reasons I have problems with men acting and portraying Jesus in movies because what flawed sinner could actually portray the facial expressions of Jesus? Anything is inferior, and I mean really inferior, compared to the countenance, way, and demeanor of Christ. He was not a sad sack; He was a man of great joy. Where did the Lord put man when He created him? He put him in a paradise. Why? Because He wanted man to be happy, joyful, and experience His pleasures! He didn't put man in a vast wilderness. He put him in a joyful place, a place of great pleasure. It's a lie to believe that if you surrender yourself to Jesus that somehow you're going to be made miserable.

I've heard so many people say, "I know I need to give Christ my life but maybe if I do He'll call me as a missionary to Africa or China or I may have to do something I won't enjoy." Let me tell you what I tell anyone who says something like that to me: God is so gloriously good that if He was to call you to be a missionary to Africa or China you would be most delighted to go. It would

be your greatest pleasure, and if you didn't go you would be most miserable. Obedience to God is a good thing. Don't listen to the voice that will drown out the voice of God. Be saved today! Know joy beyond measure! Know pleasures forevermore today. Come to Christ. Do not listen to your own voice; listen to the voice of God. Hear Him! Is there anybody burdened and heavy laden? Come and He will give you rest. Listen to Him. Come to Him.

Maybe something inside tells you cannot live the Christian life. I want to answer that: Neither can I. I can't live that life either. But, once again, that is a distorted view of what it means to be a Christian. I'm thankful that Jesus died so He doesn't remember my sins, but I am also grateful that He rose from the dead so that now Christianity is not just about being forgiven but it's about having the very person of Christ within you so that His life and power is flowing through you. The very personality of Jesus can flow from you! He transforms us. It's not you trying to serve and be like Jesus, it's Jesus being Jesus in you.

II. WE CAN'T HEAR GOD BECAUSE OUR EARS ARE TUNED TO THE VOICE OF MAN

Our ears are often tuned to what other people think and say. Six days earlier, Peter was rebuked for this very thing. Jesus had told them He was going to Jerusalem to die and He would be resurrected. Peter takes Jesus aside and personally instructs Him and says basically, "We'll not have any more discussion about You dying. That's not going to happen. I'll make sure it doesn't."

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Matthew 16:23)

Peter's mind was attuned to what people thought, to how men think, so he couldn't hear what Jesus was saying to him.

Moses is an illustration of this. At the age of 40, armed with compassion and the hope of delivering his people, Moses left the palace of Pharaoh in order to live with his people. The writer of Hebrews alludes to this. He says,

"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26)

This happened about the age of 40. God was working in his life. He was hearing God. Then one day we find him in Exodus 2:11, “Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren.” What did Moses do? Did he hear God’s voice? Did he attend to what God’s will was at that moment? No.

“So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” (Exodus 2:12)

Moses should have looked to God but instead he was looking to man. He was more afraid of man than God. He was more “man conscious” than “God conscious.” God had been working in his life to pull him away from Egypt and to identify with the people of God and he even knew that perhaps God was calling him to be the deliverer. God was working in his life. It’s a great time in Moses’ life. But at that moment he was unable to hear the voice of God because he was more concerned about what people thought.

“The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.” (Proverbs 29:25)

When you begin to be more fearful about what people think and say about you more than you are fearful of God’s approval and what He thinks of you, you will always fall into the trap that will lead to spiritual failure and not success. You can’t hear God if people and what they think about you is dominating your mind. We can’t perceive God when people have our hearts and not Him. This is one of the reasons why a sinner can’t hear God. He or she fears what people will think if they surrender to Christ. I’ve heard this several times, I’m sure you have as well. Some of you may be wrestling with this very thing. *I know I need to give my life to Christ. I know my life isn’t right. I know there’s something missing in my life, but if I give my life to Christ as you continue to plead with me to do so, what will my friends think? They will no longer be my friends. What will my family think? They will disown me.*

There is a price to follow Jesus. Yes, some will no longer want to be your friend. It would be trying to pull the wool over your eyes to say that won’t happen. Some will betray you. Some will despise you. And some of them may be your own family members. I won’t lie to you. Jesus was very clear if you follow Him there is a cross. Jesus said in Matthew 10 that the government would come against you. He said religious people would persecute you, and then He says even family mem-

bers. Finally, He says you have to deny your own self. But let me tell you what the exchange is. If you could just hear God speak to you right now you would hear Him promising you something better than any friend who would forsake you because you were a Christian; He says He will be a friend that sticks closer than a brother. You don't know what a friend is like until you know Jesus.

That same friend that will turn on you for lesser things as well. We've all had friends who we were shocked by when they turned their backs on us and refused to be our friend any longer. But Jesus will never do that. Even when you treat Him unfriendly, He will never cease to be your friend.

Don't believe the voice that fears men more than God. Hear Him! He wants to be your friend. What was it said of Abraham? He was the friend of God. I can only say to my brothers and sisters this morning that friendship with God is so powerful. Hunger for it. And if you want to be a friend of God you've got to put God first.

III. WE CAN'T HEAR GOD BECAUSE OF BEING OVERWHELMED BY NEEDS.

We can't hear God because we're overwhelmed by the need of the hour. There is a fleshly compulsion to do something, to perform. But the spirit waits on God and His leadership. Here's how you can tell the difference between a mature believer and an immature believer. The mature believer has learned through years of immaturity and failure to wait on God and that not every need is always as pressing as it might appear at the moment.

Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (Matthew 17:4)

Peter responded to this event that transpired in front of them and his first response was to do something spiritual. "Now we see the need, the need is that the people need to recognize You as Messiah. Let's build some temples! Let's forget about the temple in Jerusalem. We need some new temples. We need one for Moses representing the law, one for Elijah representing the prophets, and now we need one for You, Jesus, the Messiah, and the people of Israel will see the whole plan of God in these three temples." That's the need.

Have you ever heard the statement, "The need determines the call"? Many people believe this is how God works. If there's a need then God wants you to answer that need and that becomes the

call of God for your life. But I don't see that in the Scripture. Don't confuse that with what I've said in the past. If God reveals to you a problem, He *is* inviting you to be a part of the solution. That is singular. The needs we see around us are not singular. There are ten thousand spiritual needs around us. In fact, the world has about two billion people who have yet to hear the name Jesus. But that does not determine the call of God for you. The need does not determine the call of God. Peter saw a need. He thought it was a spiritual need that he could help fulfill. God's way of operating in through His Son. Jesus is the Lord and He determines the your call and work.

I see this often at missions conferences. In fact, it happened a few weeks ago when we had the CROSS simulcast here on a Friday night. Men sometimes say, "At the conclusion of the conference we're going to invite you to stand or come forward if you believe God is calling you to the mission field." My problem with that is that for hours you've been receiving information about the need, and the need is very great. You hear that and there is a compulsion—if you're a Christian—to make up the gap, to do something. You sit and look around and say, "What am I doing to make a difference?" Often people respond to the call and God's not involved, God's not calling them, the need is. Another way of saying is the guilt is calling.

Some of you perhaps experienced this when the book *Radical* came out a few years ago. It's a great book. But I had to answer a lot of questions while people were reading that book. "Do you think we ought to downsize our home?" I had a lady not too long ago who had just read the book ask me, "We just bought a brand new television and I read that book and I went to my husband and said, 'Don't you think we need to take this back to the store?'" Was that God speaking to her telling her to take the TV back? It could have been, but probably not. You know what it most likely was? It was guilt. Guilt is never the call of God. God doesn't call us to do His work through guilt. I'm not saying we're not guilty of a few things. But that is not the way God works.

I remember the first time I had Brother Paul Washer come preach here. He did like a lot of missionaries and talked about how much money Americans spend on pet food. There were people who left that service that day thinking they ought to get rid of their dogs and cats. Some actually said, "I think I need to go and just sell my home, build me a shack and have milk crates for furniture." What was happening? It wasn't Paul's fault. I'm not blaming Paul, I'm simply saying when somebody comes who has a burden like that and he speaks out of that burden we can immediately put that burden on ourselves. God says, "Just listen to Me. 'Hear *Him!*'"

He might want you to downsize. He might want to lead you into a stewardship ministry that would require you to sell some things and give it to the Lord, but let Him tell you that. Let Him direct you. “Aw,” you say, “now you’re back to the subjective inner-voice.” Okay, let me ask you this. How do people who do not believe God speaks subjectively enter the ministry? They all talk about having a call. What was that like? Well, they may not want to call it a voice with propositional statements but there is something on the inside that is compelling them. There’s an inner compulsion, a desire that won’t go away, a burden, if you please, and they delight in that. Very well then, don’t call it the voice of God. But you have to recognize that it was the leadership of God.

You never respond to the need just because there’s a need. You respond to Jesus Christ who is your Lord and Master. Sure, Peter, there’s a need for these people to recognize that Jesus is the Messiah and that Moses and Elijah do not contradict Jesus but they are supporting Him, but you’ve got to do what Jesus is telling you to do. So often we can’t hear what God is saying to us because we think we know what God is wanting or we’re being propelled by guilt to do something.

That’s one of the reasons whomever stands at this pulpit has to be very careful. Everyone who will listen will always run to an extreme. We will run to one extreme or another. For example, a few moments ago I said you cannot hear God unless you’ve put out of your mind the voices and opinions of others. Some will run to an ungodly, unbiblical extreme and say, “God told me _____” and it won’t matter what anybody says, they will not bring themselves into the biblical submission of the church and godly leadership. That’s taking it to a dangerous extreme. Then there are some who go to the other extreme and will only do what everyone else tells them is God’s will for their life. Neither way is God’s way. The Bible says if God does direct you, and He will direct you—He promised, “trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, but in all of your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths”—the answer is not being so individualistic that you will not submit to anyone and neither is it that you’re so dependent upon other people to know the will of God for your life. The answer is that you hear from God and if God has really spoken to you, He will confirm it in the body of Christ by those who are spiritual and mature enough to discern God’s work in your life. It always works that way. That’s how God designed the church. We hear the Master. Hear Him.

IV. WE CAN’T HEAR GOD BECAUSE WE CAN ONLY THINK ABOUT THEOLOGY

Again, look at the text. Peter's mind is pointed toward theology and it's very evident in verse 10, later in the chapter. Peter says, "Okay, we're going to build three temples," and all of the sudden the voice of God speaks. There was no subjective thing about it. It was very objective. A voice from heaven boomed, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" Listen to Him. Do what He says.

What would you think would be the first thing out of your mouth having heard the voice of God and having seen Moses and Elijah and knowing who they were—no one had to tell you? There was instant recognition. Then you see Jesus in His pre-incarnate glorification. What do you think the first thing out of your mouth? Let me tell you the first thing out of the disciples' mouth

*And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"
(Matthew 17:10)*

It was a theological question! There was a debate going on among some of the religious people of the day, "Is Elijah going to come back prior to the Messiah?" Some said yes, it would be Elijah himself, others said it wouldn't be Elijah but one who is like Elijah in life and ministry. Others, like the Sadducees, said there was no resurrection or life after death. This was a theological debate of the times and the first thing these guys want to talk about after witnessing this great scene is not to hear what Jesus really had to say and do it but let Him answer their theological problems.

I want to be kind but faithful to you and the Lord, but one of the reasons why the church may not be doing the will of the Lord is because we're too concerned about threading theological needles. Let me hasten to say that theology is good.

Theo = God
ology = the study or the knowledge of

I remember my pastor telling me when I was a teenager that he called a church that didn't have a pastor to inquire about the position. He wanted to know what their doctrine and theology was. The receptionist answered and he introduced himself and said, "I'm just thinking about sending my resume to you, can you tell me, briefly, what your theology is?" To which the receptionist said in a very gruff voice, "Oh, we don't believe in that theology stuff. We just worship God here." Well, needless to say, my pastor didn't send his resume in. Theology is very important. We are to

study and know God. Can you tell me what is higher than the pursuit of knowing God? Nothing. Therefore, God has given us His Word full of truth, doctrine, and teaching, so we can know Him. Why? So we can have theological discussions and debates and clubs about who God is and all the interesting differences about His plan for our lives? No, so we might worship Him. The lady had one thing right. They were to worship God. She just didn't know that the study of the Scriptures was to lead them to that conclusion.

I'm not trying to be harsh or critical, I believe this has great impact, especially among reformed circles of which we would say we identified with. There is too much narrowness in our theology. We're more concerned about whether someone is a Calvinist or an Arminian rather than a follower of Jesus. We're more concerned about whether someone is a Baptist or a Methodist. We're more concerned about whether one can believe prior to regeneration or after regeneration, when the truth is we don't know when the Spirit comes we only know the effect of His coming. I believe that only someone who is regenerated can exercise faith but if somebody doesn't believe that yet they show me the fruit of the Spirit and the evidence of the life of Christ in them, they are my brother, they are my sister.

We can become too narrow in our theology. Theology is given to expand us to worship by knowing God better and we've narrowed the study of theology to specifics that split and divide us, and therefore we can't hear God and His purpose and will for our lives. Am I saying to abandon our doctrines? No. But I am saying we should not exclude true brothers and sisters because they may not thread the theological needle exactly as you and I do. When we're more concerned about having our doctrine right than knowing and worshipping and obeying God, something is wrong.

Here again the person who is not a disciple of Jesus cannot hear God because he or she is trying to understand all mysteries before believing upon Christ. You're trying to figure this whole thing out, but I've got news for you. I've been doing this for years and I still haven't got it figured out. Jesus didn't say, "Hear Me and do what I say if you understand everything I say." Even His apostles didn't understand. They heard Him but they really didn't hear Him.

You don't need to understand everything and all mysteries in order to follow Jesus. You don't. All you need to know is this: He is who He said He was and He will do what He said He will do. Within that sentence there are these certain principles: you are not like Him. You have transgressed His ways. You have rebelled and rejected Him. You have not come under His submission.

You do not want to do what He has wanted you to do. You have willfully acknowledged that you have not submitted your life to Him. But now you want to. What is that? Faith and repentance. And that is required. When you come to Christ He is not asking you to join a club or religious institution, He's asking you to give your life to Him and He become your Lord.

The Bible says you must trust in Him, believe upon Him. What does that mean? It means you so trust your life to Him that you know He's has everything necessary accomplished. No matter what happens in your life, you know He will see you through and He will get you home safely. It's not just forgiveness of sin and escaping hell, it's trusting Him with everything about you. You believe what He said He would do. You believe He is who He said He was. That's faith. The Bible says if you do that and that's all you know, He will save you if you call out to Him.

There are a lot of mysteries about God. God is infinite. How in the world do you think we could understand infinity with these small limited minds and finite hearts? There is absolutely no way. It amazes me that all God said to Abram, when he was an idolater in the Ur of Chaldees, was "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

That's all He said to him. Abram didn't know where he was going or how he was going to get there. He didn't know what he would find when he got there. He didn't even know when he would know he was there. He didn't know where he was going so he wouldn't know when he got there. He had to depend on one thing only. What was it? Hearing God. "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" Abraham did it and he was called the friend of God. That's all God is asking you to do. Just obey Him and don't be surprised when He directs your path that He doesn't tell you how it's all going to happen. He won't, because He wants you to trust Him.

How do I hear God? Deny your own voice and its validity making it secondary to God. Don't fear people more than God. Don't let people direct you or let what they'll think of you guide you in your obedience to God. Don't let the need of that very moment persuade you through guilt or just wanting to do something to help be the motivation. Let God motivate you according to His plan for your life. Lastly, don't start studying this Book in order to get theologically intelligent. Study the theology of this Book in order to know God better and you will hear Him.

Tonight I'm going to continue and talk about how to seek the Lord and all that this entails in order to hear Him. I pray God has spoken to you as I've spoken this morning. It's my prayer that somehow supernaturally beyond my abilities that God will speak as I'm speaking to you. I really believe that man doesn't believe by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Every word for that moment. Let's not argue how He communicates that word. Let's not try to thread the theological needle so thinly, let's just agree that He does direct our paths if we'll let Him. Amen.