

- I. God's Promises; Sunday, November 30, 2014  
(Sunnyslope)

Psalm 19:14

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be  
pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

- A. "Good morning, church!"
- B. If you turn on the television or go to the movies, you'll see a lot of fiction and even supposed non-fiction content about some sort of coming doom to Earth
1. It seems like any time I turn the TV to the History channel or the Science channel, I see shows about inbound asteroids or comets that will wipe out most life on Earth
    - a) There are shows on other channels about future pandemics that will kill us all
    - b) There are shows about a future zombie apocalypse
    - c) Shows about the financial markets of the world collapsing and turning us all back into farmers and nomads
    - d) There are movies about the Earth being destroyed through one of a great variety of different means and how the human race somehow has to struggle to find a way to survive
  2. As the audience, as viewers, we can all too easily get wrapped up in these fears, because fear engages an audience
    - a) Even Christians can fall victim to letting these fears take hold
    - b) We Christians tend to forget the logical truth that there cannot both be God and the destruction of Earth...

- c) ...because God promised never to destroy the Earth
- 3. The problem we slide into here with this doomsday stuff is that we end up listening to the wrong source
  - a) We end up listening to the doomsday prophets on TV...
  - b) ...instead of God's prophets in Scripture and to God's own promises
- 4. I believe it's critical to remember that to whom we listen will change our whole personality
  - a) When we listen to God, we will be happy and at peace
  - b) When we fail to listen to God (and instead listen to any other source), we will slide quickly into fear, sadness, frustration, and irritation
  - c) So if you find yourself sliding into fear, sadness, frustration, or irritation on more than a rare case, it may be helpful to examine just who your listening to
- C. There was a fairly significant rain storm a few days ago, I think back on Friday
  - 1. The winds rose up, and the rain dumped down
  - 2. There was flooding all around
  - 3. A road out by the water even overflowed with the high tide and sustained winds pushing the water up
  - 4. But when it was all over, there appeared in the northern sky a gigantic rainbow
  - 5. For some, and it was the case for us at our house, the rainbow was one of those rare "double rainbows"

- D. These rainbows, in fact all rainbows, should act as a reminder to us of God's promise not to destroy the Earth

Genesis 9:17

So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

1. However, in order for us to feel safe, we need to first listen to the promise
  2. In other words, if we don't read Genesis 9 and listen to the promise God made therein, we won't feel the safety of those promises
- E. One small point here: Have you noticed something about God and His promises?
1. God always precedes divine intervention with a promise
  2. Always
  3. God always makes a promise to do something...
  4. ...and only after making the promise does God actually do something
  5. Why is that, do you think?
  6. Could it be that God does this so we have an opportunity to listen?
  7. If so, why is listening so important?
  8. We'll come back to this in a bit

II. Today is the first day of Advent, the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas Day

- A. Advent is a season observed in many Western Christian churches as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Christ
1. The term is an anglicized version of the Latin word "adventus", meaning "coming"

2. It is the beginning of the Western liturgical year (for churches that have a high liturgy, which we aren't)
  3. In the Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist calendars (which includes our own), Advent starts on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday before December 25<sup>th</sup>, which happens to be today
- B. For Christians, the season of Advent anticipates the coming of Christ from two different perspectives
1. The season offers the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah...
  2. ...and it reminds us to be alert for His Second Coming
- C. It is also a time of celebration, because through Christ we are saved
1. It is a time to remember the grace of God
  2. ...to remember the justification of that grace
  3. ...and how blessed we are to have a pathway to salvation, sanctification, and communion with the Almighty
- D. Advent is like listening to the promise of what will be fulfilled in Christmas
1. It's also a reminder for us to listen to *all* signs and wisdom from God
    - a) God provides us answers, wisdom, advise, and direction
    - b) He does so both in Scripture...
    - c) ...and through answered prayer
  2. God is not silent

- III. I'd like to ask a very serious question: Does God speak obviously today, to us, in our lives, in unambiguous and powerful ways?
- A. I firmly believe the answer is: Yes
  - B. But do we listen well enough?
    - 1. What if you could hear God's voice clearly and obviously and unambiguously?
    - 2. Here's perhaps an uncomfortable question: Would you want that?
    - 3. Or would you feel so uncomfortable that you'd want to hide from God's voice (like Adam and Eve)?
  - C. Our God is awesome
    - 1. Our God is the most extraordinary, fascinating, intriguing, exciting, mysterious, yet accessible Being in the universe
    - 2. It boggles the mind and excites the heart that the One who has the power to speak the universe into existence and uphold the laws of nature delights in helping us find a lost pen or choose which bus to take
    - 3. I'm totally impressed by God's commitment to be personally involved with the creatures He has created
  - D. Christianity is close communication with our Creator
    - 1. True Christianity must include hearing God
      - a) The more we fulfill the Biblical conditions of hearing God's voice, the more we take the lid off the limitations we impose on the ways He speaks, we will learn to experience God fully

- b) When we are born again at a conversion through commitment of our lives to the Lord Jesus and enter into a relationship with God as our Father, we have every reason to expect Him to speak to us
  - c) Normal Christianity includes our hearing our heavenly Father's voice any time He sees that we have a need
2. We have to hear God daily to follow Him
- a) We aren't meant to direct our own lives

Jeremiah 10:23

I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.

- b) This is fantastic news because we can rejoice in the fact that God wants us to let Him lead us to fulfillment
- c) We can relax about making the right decisions; we only need to worry about speaking with, listening to, and following God

Matthew 4:4

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

- d) Therefore, it's totally impossible to effectively function as a Christian without hearing God's voice as a way of life
3. We've been promised God's voice

John 8:47

He who belongs to God hears what God says.

- a) We can hear his voice in the small things

Isaiah 58:11

The Lord will guide you continually.

- b) We can hear his voice in the big things

Psalm 48:14

He will be our guide even to death.

- IV. But there are conditions we must meet if we desire to hear God's voice
- A. God certainly has made exceptions and communicated with folks regardless of their condition
    - 1. However, we have wisdom from Scripture that tell us some preconditions that in a general case should be met before we should expect to hear God's voice
  - B. Let's go through the conditions required then to listen to God
  - C. Clean Heart
    - 1. We need to have a clean heart to be able to hear God's voice

Psalm 66:18

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.

- 2. In Luke 20, because the scribes were not prepared to be honest with Jesus, He refused to answer their questions
  - 3. Begin prayer by asking God for forgiveness of sins, but be willing to hear God say, "Go seek forgiveness from the person you sinned against."
- D. Faith
- 1. We need to believe in God and believe that He answers prayer
    - a) The belief should be expectation of an answer, not just awareness of the possibility

Hebrews 11:6

Without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

2. We have many reasons to have faith:

- a) As a God of the knowledge of all that is knowable, He has the answers. He knows where He wants us to be, at what time, and what we are to say and do
- b) As a God of limitless power, He has the ability to communicate in every language
- c) As a God of infinite wisdom, He knows how and when to communicate
- d) As a God of total justice, He will only tell us to do what is right and just for us and everyone else involved with our decisions
- e) As a God of absolute righteousness, he will never tell us to do anything unholy or inconsistent with His character or the principles in His Word, the Bible
- f) As a God of unfathomable love, He longs to communicate with us

Psalm 32:8

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.

Psalm 48:14

For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death.

Isaiah 30:21

Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand of whenever you turn to the left.

Isaiah 48:17

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go."

E. Expectant Listening

- 1. When we pray, we need to listen expectantly

2. We need to listen to God's voice with our full attention focused on Him

Mark 9:7

This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him.

3. We need to ask ourselves, "How much serious listening time to do we give God, as a way of life. Not just time for answers to our questions, but time for anything He may want to say to us?"

Psalms 81:11-13

But my people would not heed my voice, and Israel would have none of me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn hearts, to walk in their own counsels. Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways.

F. Humility

1. One of our greatest struggles, especially as Americans, is to walk in humility at ever increasingly deeper levels
2. C. S. Lewis wrote that: Humility is not thinking less of one's self, but thinking of one's self less
  - a) Sharalyn often calls the "thinking less of one's self" mentality as "false humility"
  - b) True humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less
3. When it comes to experiencing divine guidance, the Bible makes it clear that we will not make any progress without humility

Psalms 25:9

He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way.

4. Pride feels no need to inquire of God and to spend time seeking His Will

- a) From God's perspective, it's both proud and foolish to live independently of Him by continuously making our own decisions and hoping of presuming they are in His will

Psalm 53:2

God looks down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any that are wise, that seek after God.

- 5. Even Christ did nothing independently of God

John 5:19

I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself. He can do only what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.

G. Yielded Will

- 1. The last condition of hearing God's voice, and probably the most important, is that we must have a yielded will
- 2. Guidance from God will be according to the extent of our commitment to do His will
- 3. When we give up our notions of what's the best choice of good options and we let God's Will decide, we experience unparalleled blessings

V. So as we are approaching Christmas, progressing now through Advent, I think we have to ask ourselves: Are we really, honestly listening to God?

A. We know that God speaks obviously, loudly, and directly to us today

B. But do we listen well enough?

- 1. Knowing that you could hear God's voice clearly and obviously and unambiguously...
- 2. ...is that something you want?
- 3. Or do you feel too uncomfortable being that transparent with God

- C. Remember how earlier in the sermon I said that God always precedes divine intervention with a promise?
1. And then I asked why
  2. Well, let's explore that
  3. Let's start with the axiomatic statement that God can do anything (something with which hopefully we all already agree)
    - a) God can do anything
    - b) And therefore a derivative of that axiom is that God could just solve problems straight way, without first making a promise
    - c) And yet when we explore Scripture, we see time and time again where God doesn't just do; instead, He first makes a promise
    - d) Sometimes those promises precede the divine intervention by only a moment, other times they precede the divine intervention by generations
    - e) But the pattern is always there: God makes a promise before solving a problem, then He honors His promise
  4. We have a multitude of examples of this from Scripture
    - a) In the story of Noah and the ark, God starts with a promise to save Noah and rid the world of the evil in it
    - b) In the Exodus story, God starts with a series of promises to lead Israel out of Egypt
    - c) When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God promises to provide water out of the rock twice

- d) Even the very destination of the Israelites is referred to as the "Promised Land"
- e) And as we are in Advent, heading toward Christmas, we should remember of course the most important promise of all: Christ, the coming Messiah

5. So why does God always promise before doing?

- a) Is it because without the promise before doing, we can't listen?
- b) And if we can't listen, there's no opportunity for hope?
- c) And by having hope, we have a reason to rejoice before the blessing

D. In this time of Advent, let us remember that our greatest hope and reason to rejoice is in the promises given through Christ:

- 1. That those who believe in Him and truly submit themselves to God and place Christ as Lord in their lives will not die but will have eternal life

E. Amen