

# “HOW GOD TALKS TO US” - Part 1

Can You Hear Me Now?

Job 33:14-28 July 25, 2010

We are talking about hearing God speak, for God wants to speak to us. Our Lord has the words, the advice to get us through whatever crisis the world throws at us. Some people find that surprising, but the Bible is filled with hundreds of stories of God communicating with, talking to people. And if you think about it, if God didn't talk to people, we wouldn't have a Bible. The Bible is the story of the interaction between deity and humanity. And a lot of times, in those conversations, God told the people to write it down so we would have the advantage of hearing what God said.

God doesn't always communicate in the same way. But then, why should He? He can use any way He wants, and that's important because we don't always hear the same way. What works for one may not work for another. With Moses, it was through a burning bush. An angel was sent to Abraham and Jacob. For a man named Balaam, a donkey spoke to deliver God's message. And how many of you are saying, "Hey God's doing that right now." Very funny.

What we already know is verified in Job 33, "*God speaks in different ways but we don't always recognize His voice.*" God speaks to us in many different ways. He's not limited to any single way. The problem is, often we don't recognize God's voice. We don't realize that it's God talking through that person or fire or donkey. So we have to work on our ability to perceive the message.

Today we are going to start looking at ways that God speaks. We will look at three ways today and three more in two weeks. There are other ways, but these six are more common. And it begins with ...

## **1. God Speaks to Us Through the Bible.**

It makes sense to start here. If we want to hear God speak, why not go to His Word. God sent us a text message before we even knew what a text message was. I admit that his text message is a little longer than most, but it is a text message none the less. We need to take a look at it to see what the Lord wants to tell us. Some people long for God to give them some sign to help make one of life's major decisions. He did. He sent a text that records what God has already said to thousands of people. And God continues to speak to us as long as we have the Bible open. When we close it, we shut God off. If we're never opening the Bible, if we're not reading the book, God isn't talking to us very much. Because the number one way God speaks to us, is in the Book.

2 Timothy 3:16 "*Everything in the Scriptures is God's word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live.*" Do you hear what that says? The Bible can teach us, help us, correct us, and show us how to live. Because the Bible is God's Word, it is all useful, and reliable and 100% practical. Some parts are hard to figure out. Some sections we really have to study. But it's all there to help us. Even the parts that don't make sense to us. Even the parts that we don't understand. Or that we don't like.

There is a group of Biblical scholars known as the Jesus Seminar. They are very knowledgeable and highly educated. I'm not sure that I could successfully debate any of them even though I think I'm not so bad in my own right. But the thing with the Jesus Seminar is that they have tried to determine which of the words attributed to Jesus were really his, and which were added by later writers. Now I have some concerns with their methodology that I won't go into here. But the basic problem with the mind set is that you either accept it

all, believe it all, or it is of no value. If we take the stance that some is good and others is not, then we are setting ourselves as the judge over God’s Word, rather than allowing God’s Word to judge us. If God says His Word is true and useful, we either accept it, or we make ourselves the judge over God. Not a good idea.

How do we get a grasp on the Word of God? We do it five ways, with each corresponding to the fingers of a hand, beginning with weakest. We hear it, read it, study it, memorize it, and meditate on it. Hearing is like the little finger and meditating is the thumb that we wrap around the Word. Like a hand can grasp the book, through these fingers we can grasp the gospel. And once we have a good hold, it is not easy for anyone to take it away.

Why is it important to get a hold on the Word of God? Psalm 119:105 *“Your word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path.”* The Bible is a lamp that can guide us and light the path we need to travel. It's not a high intensity beam that will show us five, ten, twenty years down the road. The Lord won't show us that because it would probably scare us big time, and then we would be tempted to try to “help” God get things done in a better way. Not a good plan. A better way is just to walk with God day by day, that our faith might grow, that we might move closer to God day by day.

The most common way God speaks to all of us is through the Bible. So we need to have a Bible. Which Bible? One you can understand. Mostly I use the New International Version and the New Revised Standard. But in putting these messages together I will use a dozen or so different translations, simply because some will speak to a situation better than others. So look for something that you can read. And if you can't afford a Bible, talk to me and we will make sure that you have God's Word in your hand. Because that's how God speaks to us the most. And then,

## **2. God Speaks Through Gifted Teachers.**

Ephesians 4:11-12 *“Christ gifted some to be apostles, prophets, missionaries, pastors and teachers.”* Why does Jesus do that? *“So that His people would learn to serve and His body would grow strong.”*

So God has gifted teachers. How do I know who they are? I know it when someone is teaching, and suddenly I feel like God is speaking directly to me, like everyone else in the room disappears and they're focusing directly on me. It's like Roberta Flack singing “Killing Me Softly”: “He's singing my life with his words.” That's important for God is working in that moment, saying, “I've got something to say to you right now.” The ability to say something relevant and personal to an individual in the midst of a class or a crowd is the work of God. That is the spiritual gift of teaching.

Now there is another test we need to use when anyone is teaching, including me. It's found in Romans 12:6. It speaks to teachers and students: *“God in His kindness gave each of us different gifts. If your gift is speaking God's word make sure that what you say agrees with the faith.”*

If someone has the gift of teaching, their teaching is to agree with the Bible. I don't care how convincing someone is, or what sort of emotional reaction they can get out of you, if they are not agreeing with scripture, it's not the gift of teaching. I'm not talking about the ability to play games with logic. I'm not talking about being able to give a good speech or tell a good story. I'm talking about God speaking to you through what somebody is saying. That's what it says in 1 Corinthians 2:13: *“We don't speak in words taught by human wisdom. This is something different. We speak in words taught by the Spirit as we explain spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit.”*

Some people think that I don't pray before I preach. In truth my prayers start long before I stand up. But you don't hear me pray because you're not the one I'm praying to. It is God who needs to be in charge of me and the messages I bring. Because if it is not God speaking through me, then there is no power in what I say. It is all about God speaking through whoever is bringing God's Word. As I have said before, I am amazed when people claim that I am talking about their life. Not me. It is all about the Lord using me and speaking through me, as He speaks through others.

So God speaks through His word, the Bible. He speaks through gifted teachers, and then,

### **3. God Speaks Through Godly Friends and Family**

Particularly if they're believers, Of course we sometimes have trouble believing or accepting that. It is easy to ignore those who are closest to us. “That's just my mom/dad/brother/sister. You're just a friend. God couldn't be talking through you.” Don't you realize that God puts people around us who can deliver His messages to us? We are told that in Proverbs 12:26 *“The godly give wise advice to their friends. The wicked lead them astray.”* The thing is, we all have blind spots in our lives. Some of us have bald spots but all of us have blind spots. We have things in our life that we're never going to see that need to be corrected. God puts people around us to tell us the truth. Everybody needs somebody in their life who loves them enough to tell them the truth.

Do you have anybody like that in your life? People who don't just tell you what you want to hear? But they love you enough to speak the truth, even when it hurts. They love you enough to say, “You're making a big mistake. You're full of pride. You're going the wrong direction.” If we don't have somebody like that, we are setting ourselves up to make a lot of stupid, unnecessary mistakes. Because none of us see it all clearly. There have been any number of mistakes I avoided because I listened to my wife, or someone on staff, or a trusted friend. If you don't have anybody in your life who loves you enough to do that, you need to get them. For we all need to have people who love us enough to tell us the truth, even when it hurts.

Not only do we need those people in our life, we need to be that kind of person as well. Are you that sort of friend to anybody? Because if we're not able to level with someone who's messing up their life, going the wrong way, we're not much of a friend. And I don't think I can overemphasize this. I've talk before about meeting with others for encouragement and support. This is one benefit of that, because we have people around us who love us enough to tell us the truth, especially when I am messing up my life.

If we don't read the Bible, if we don't listen to godly teachers at church or Bible study, if we don't have friends we trust to tell us the truth, then we are missing an awful lot of chances to hear God. Because God is using these methods all the time in an attempt to get through to us. And if we are not hearing from God, then we start relying on our own wisdom, which isn't very wise. It leads to pride and God hates pride. Pride is a terrible sin. The middle of pride is I. The middle of sin is I. When everything has to be built around I, then there's no room for God. Pride, sinful pride makes us defensive and unteachable. “Who are you to tell me? First make sure that you're sinless before you start casting stones at me!” Wrong! A person doesn't have to be perfect to point out something in the life of another. We do not judge the person, but we do judge actions and attitudes. When we're prideful we build walls to keep people far away. Then we can't hear God's voice speaking through others.

Proverbs 12:15 *“Stupid people always think they are right.”* Put that on your refrigerator door! Put it on your husband's mirror! And on your mirror. *“Stupid people always think they are right. Wise people listen to*

*advice.*” Now this is a pretty tough verse because everyone thinks that they are right. I mean, if they thought they were wrong, they would start thinking and acting in another. The difference comes in our willingness to listen to others. God wants to use us to help others grow. And God will speak through us. But it takes courage. And God wants to speak to us through others. And that takes humility. We need to be willing to listen.

Right now, many of you know someone who is headed down the wrong path in life. Maybe a friend, a co-worker, or someone in the family. You can see it as clear as day, but they can't or won't. They're involved in an affair, or they're getting addicted to something. Or they're walking away from Jesus. They're just messing up their life. You've seen it, but have said nothing. “Who am I to say something?” You're someone who loves them enough to tell them the truth. Don't use the cowardly excuse of “It's none of my business.” It is our business because we care about them, about what's happening in their life. Allow God to use you to speak to others, not in anger or in any judgmental way, but courageously, in the love and care of God.

Of course, in the same way, God will speak through others to us. And at times it hurts. So we need to remember Proverbs 27:6 “*Wounds from a friend are better than many kisses from an enemy. In the end people appreciate frankness more than flattery.*” We don't suck up to people so they will love us. No. We love them enough to say, “You've got spinach in your teeth.” We love them enough to say, “That's not right!”

We live in a time and place where many, maybe even most believe that they can do anything they want, anything that might make them happy. We are very focused on demanding our rights. But in truth, a joyous life is not based on demanding rights but in doing what is right and what is righteous. A life of significance does not come by focusing on ourselves, our wants and desires. It is about focusing on God and what God wants. It is only by focusing on God that we can live in joy and peace regardless of what the world is doing around us, or trying to force on us. A life of power and significance is based on God and God alone. That means that we have to learn to hear God. We hear God speak through the Bible, through gifted, godly teachers, and through the people around us, particularly if they are living in God. God wants to speak to you. Do you have your ears on? May you hear what the Spirit is saying. And in your life, may it be so. Amen.