

Goal: That the hearers would more readily listen as God’s servants today.

As a pastor, there’s one question I am asked again and again, whether I’m at a school activity or hanging out at Kailua beach, “*Why did you become a pastor?*” My response, “*Well, God called me.*” Their reaction is priceless, “*So God talks to you?*” I don’t want to come across as some sort of religious fanatic, so I try to explain how God speaks to me through the Bible and through other Christians, but after 70 or 80 times of hearing this question I’m just tempted to just say, “*God told me to purify the world with fire! What’s your address?*” I’d never do that, but I like to humor myself. So, does God actually speak to us? Of course, but that’s not the question. The real question is, are we listening? The story of Samuel this morning reminds us to listen for God’s voice.

Samuel’s story begins in an amazing way. His mother, Hannah, was unable to have kids, but she really wanted a child. So, she prayed and prayed, and she vowed that if God would help her and give her a son, she would dedicate them to His service. (***“She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.” (1 Samuel 1: 10 – 11)***) She conceived, bore a son, and called him Samuel, which means “*the Lord heard*”. Then after he was weaned, she gave him to Eli, the high priest.

“Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.” (1 Samuel 3: 1) But that’d soon change. Samuel was sleeping near the tabernacle, just outside of the Holy of Holies, when a voice calls him. Samuel gets up and goes to Eli. But it wasn’t Eli. This happens again and Eli realizes that it’s not the boy’s imagination, it’s God. ***“Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.” (1 Samuel 3: 9 – 10)*** So began career of the first great prophet of Israel. Great because he was open to listening as a servant.

Now, there’s a difference between listening and hearing. Hearing is a physical process where sound waves enter your ears. Hearing, unless you have a physical limitation, happens automatically. Listening, on the other hand, requires focus and concentration. Listening requires intent. One person compared listening to a catcher on a baseball team. Catchers must concentrate their attention on the pitcher. The pitcher is the absolute center of things. Can you imagine if a catcher became bored as he was squatting there behind the plate, and he decides to practice signals while the pitch is sent?

One problem we struggle with is that instead of listening closely to what someone is saying, we can get distracted after a sentence or two and start to think about what we're going to say in response. That means that we don't always listen to the rest of what the other person is saying, but we're instead thinking about our views and thoughts on the matter. This past week, Rachel asked me to talk to Ben about a concern he had. We did, but later that night when she asked Ben how our conversation went, he said, "*Dad did a lot of talking.*" My grandmother used to tell me, "*God gave you two ears and one mouth, which means you should listen twice as much as you talk.*" Listening is extremely important in our relationships, and it is eternally important when it comes to God.

God speaks to us through His Word, but He also speaks to us through our life experiences and He speaks to us in the silence of our thoughts after we've laid out our needs and concerns before Him. That's why prayer is so important. We come before God with our concerns. He already knows our concerns before we enunciate them, but it's important that we bring them to Him still. Then we pause and wait for a few moments, maybe even a few hours, to see if God has something to say to us. Remember, God has concerns too. They may be concerns about how we are living our lives. It may be about someone in our family who needs our attention. It may be about something that needs to be done in the church or in the community. We need to always give God a chance to speak. We need to take time in our prayer life to listen to Him.

But time isn't something we are always willing to give. We can be impatient, rushed, and hard pressed by all of the other things in our lives to not have the time to listen. Not only that but the number of distractions competing for our time makes quiet listening very difficult. If you haven't noticed before, there's a reason we ask you to silence your cell phones during worship and we have times of silence during our worship. We are making a concerted effort to listen to God. And we need to because I know the peril of not listening closely to Him. If we don't concentrate on listening to God then we'll hear lots of other voices instead.

For example, in our second lesson today God says, "***Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,***

for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6: 18 – 20) Sounds crystal clear, right? But there are lots of other voices offering counterviews. They might say, *“God is love and sex is immoral when it’s not love. But if two people love each other, and it doesn’t hurt anyone else, they can do whatever they want.”* Is that what you heard God say? No! God defines sexually immorality in great detail throughout scriptures. He created sex to only be between a husband and wife. It’s pretty simple. There is no grey area, but thanks to TV, movies, pornography, and the internet, we can end of listening to so many other voices and not God’s.

There’s something else to note about young Samuel. ***“Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.” (1 Samuel 3: 7)*** So Samuel had been serving the Lord in the temple daily, but he didn’t know Him? Sadly, there are many today in churches, singing, serving, and going through the motions, thinking they know the Lord, but they don’t! Instead, of listening to the Lord, they are listening to lots of other voices including their own hearts. And the end result of that is scary. I’m scared for them, because if they trust in a God whom they’ve created, in their own likeness, they’re going to be in for a rude awakening on the last day. They’ll call out to Jesus and He’ll say, *“I don’t know you, and you obviously don’t know me.”* ***“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ ‘Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matthew 7: 22 – 24)***

So we need to listen to God’s voice. We need to concentrate on His Word. We need to quiet all of the other distractions around us and within us. We need to set aside time to stop talking, stop working, and simply say, ***“Speak, for your servant hears”*** then quietly listen. Listen to what the Lord says to you today. *“I forgive you all of your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”* *“Take, eat, this is My body, given for you. Take, drink, this is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.”* *“Depart in peace and serve the Lord.”* Yes, God speaks to me, and God speaks to you. Today, we learn a few lessons from an old priest named Eli and from a young boy named Samuel to humbly respond to the Lord’s call by saying, ***“Speak Lord, for Your Servant Hears.”*** And you will. Amen.