

Sermon Transcript

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February 9th, 2020

Text: Isaiah 50:4-8

Title: "Learning to Listen"

Subject: The importance of learning to listen to God

Textual Idea: Jesus, the Messiah, emptied Himself of His divine power when He came. One of the things that He needed to learn, was how to listen to His Heavenly Father.

Sermon Idea: Jesus needed to learn to listen to His Father. So do we.

Key Points:

1. Jesus needed to learn to listen because His ears were stopped. So are ours (vs 5)
2. Jesus needed to learn to listen because He didn't know how to speak a word that sustains the weary (vs 4) So do we
3. Jesus needed to learn to listen daily (vs 4) So do we

What do I want people to know?

Our ears are stopped and need to be opened to listen to the Holy Spirit within.

What do I want people to do? Not turn their backs on this invitation but to run towards it.

What need am I addressing? Our hunger for intimacy with our Heavenly Father.

[Title Slide] Good morning. It is a great privilege and an honor to be with you this morning to open God's word together. It is extra special that I get to preach on the day Katie, Corey, Jacob and Will are here.

Let me briefly tell you a little about myself. Certainly, starting with the important stuff – I am married to my best friend and ministry partner Barbara – we met 46 years ago last month and have been married over 40 years. We have three daughters; 8 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren. All but one lives within two hours of here. That is a great gift to Barbara and me.

Vocationally, I was trained to be an engineer and worked in that field for 50 years. The last 31 years, with another brother in Christ, we ran a small engineering firm in Simsbury. The most unique thing about our business is that part of our mission was to make disciples of our employees and our clients. Another blessing about running this business, is that it was there that I was able to put into practice a number of the principles I am going to share with you this morning.

For the past 30 years, my wife and I have had the privilege of helping people learn how to listen to God and experience the elusive intimacy that the Scripture points us to but remains remote for many of God's children. We have done this through listening retreats and spiritual direction.

We have had over 2000 people on Listening retreats over those 30 years. We see these retreats as a way to push the pause button on our lives. One of the spiritual disciplines we teach people on these retreats is what we call Listening Prayer

One of the reasons Andre asked me to preach this morning was to **[Retreat Slide]** encourage you to consider signing up for a Listening retreat coming up on Saturday February 22nd here at Wintonbury. I want to encourage you to seriously consider setting apart from 9 -3 on that Saturday to experience the intimacy that comes with Listening to God.

Before we go too far – I want to Provide some definitions of what we mean by: Hearing God's voice; Listening to God and Listening Prayer.

The first thing I want to say is that, when we use the term hearing God's voice or Listening to God, we are not talking about hearing an audible voice. It is rare that God speaks to us audibly. I have never heard God speaking audibly. But I believe that I have heard him speak to me. In asking people if they have ever heard God speak audibly, we find that about 10-15% of you have on at least one occasion heard God speak to them audibly.

So when we use the terms "God speaking to us" or "Hearing God's voice" it can be misleading. But the terms are used both in the Old and the New Testament and we

don't know in most cases if it was audible or not. It is my opinion, that in most cases it was not audible.

Since the Pentecost, the primary ways that God speaks is through Jesus' Spirit's illumination of the Scriptures and Jesus' Spirit's voice speaking within our hearts.

That's the first important point – Listening to God is not about attempting to hear an audible voice.

The second point I want to make is that when we “hear” from the Spirit is not on the same level as what we hear from the authoritative written word of God. We are not adding to scripture

When the apostle Paul talks about the Spirit of God speaking [Testing slide] to individuals and to groups in both 1 Corinthians 14:29¹ and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21², in both contexts Paul instructs the church to test the words that come through the Spirit. Test to see if it is true. Weigh what is spoken against the written Word of God. Check with each other to see if this is true.

That is not the way we treat the written word of God. We don't check to see if it is really God speaking. But things that come to us by the Spirit need testing and they don't carry the weight of the written word of God. That doesn't mean we don't take action on what we hear – but only after it has been vetted as best we can.

Summarize – [Listening Prayer Not] So Listening to God through prayer OR what we call Listening Prayer is not looking to hear an audible voice. It is not looking to hear something that has the same authority as scripture.

So that's what it is not – but what is Listening Prayer and how do we practice it?

[What is Listening Prayer]

At a very basic level, Listening Prayer happens when we quiet ourselves / eliminate our distractions and attempt to hear what the Spirit of God / Jesus' Spirit is saying to us. Quieting ourselves and eliminating distractions is not emptying our mind. Learning to listen to God is one of the most mind intensive disciplines I know. It's like when you are in the woods with a birder / a birdwatcher. And they say “Can you hear the lark's song in the distant?” We strain our ears and apply all of our faculties straining to hear the lark's gentle song. That is analogous to what we do in Listening Prayer.

So after quieting ourselves then we attempt to listen to a “voice” that is not our own, speaking from within by His Spirit. This is the real work. Fully concentrating on Jesus' Spirit who dwells within. Finally we attempt to discern – Is this God speaking or is it just

¹ ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh (discern, evaluate, judge) what is said. ESV

² ⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good

my own thoughts – and how we do that is a topic for another day. But I would say that in my experience helping more than a thousand people do this, discerning whether it is of God is not as hard as you might think – and most importantly we don't need to be afraid of it.

Now I recognize that there might be some of you who are uncomfortable with the practice of Listening Prayer or don't believe that it is a biblical way of praying. You are not alone – many brothers and sisters that I deeply respect have a differing opinion on this. I would love to have an opportunity to dialogue with you about that some time. Let's have breakfast or lunch together. My [contact info] is on the screen or you can call the office and they can get you in contact with me.

With those definitions aside, let's pray and then open God's word together.

Prayer

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were doing something that you thought you knew what you were doing but found that there was so much more to learn than you expected?

[Open up to the congregation]

How about marriage – Any of you find that there was a lot more to learn about being a husband or a wife than you expected?

Or How about Parenting – We do more training for driving a car than we do for parenting. But how many of us have found that there is so much more to learn about being a parent than we thought.

For me - Learning to Listen to God / to hear Him speak to us / That is something I didn't think I needed to learn. After all, didn't Jesus say "My sheep hear my voice."

One day I heard [Dallas Willard] say – "We may mistakenly think that we would automatically recognize God's voice if God spoke to us. ... To think we will recognize God's voice without having to learn is a mistake."

Hmmm! We need to learn how to hear God's voice? Why do we need to learn to hear God's voice?

Dallas Willard listed some reasons after the book this quote comes from:

- our fallen nature provides some blocks that prevent us from hearing God's voice
- listening to each other requires skills that don't come naturally, so that can be applied to our relationship with God
- The Father, Son and Spirit's voice is very gentle and not easy to discern

Okay, I get that. Those are good natural reasons for us to learn how to listen to God. But does the scripture teach us that we need to learn to Listen to God's voice? To hear Him speak to us through the Scriptures and through the Holy Spirit? Our scripture today provides what in my opinion, is the most compelling answer to that question

Our Text Isaiah 50:4-8 Page 509 in the Pew Bible

As you are turning there, let me provide you with a little context about Isaiah /who he was / where does he fit in history

Isaiah was a prophet to the southern Kingdom – Judah. You may remember that after Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel divided into two kingdoms: Israel to the north and Judea to the south. Isaiah lived in the 8th Century BC and prophesied for possibly as long as 64 years.

Chapter 50 can be divided into three sections : God address Israel in the first and third sections and the Messiah speaking in the second section.

[Isa 50:1-3](#) has God addressing Israel. There is most likely a bad chapter break here and verses 1-3 are a continuation of the complaint by God against Israel from chapter 49. Remember, chapter breaks were added later and are not part of the original inspired word of God.

In the last section God addresses **Israel** ([Isa 50:10-11](#)) again and it consists of the Spirit's counsel to those who are of the day and to those who are of the night.

Smack dab in the middle we find these beautiful words from Jesus, the Messiah ([Isa 50:4-9](#));

Let's read **[the text]** (NIV)

The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary.

He wakens me morning by morning,
wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.

⁵ The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears;
I have not been rebellious,
I have not turned away.

⁶ I offered my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;
I did not hide my face
from mocking and spitting.

⁷ Because the Sovereign LORD helps me,
I will not be disgraced.

Therefore have I set my face like flint,
and I know I will not be put to shame.

⁸ He who vindicates me is near.

Let me tell you where we are going this morning. Almost all conservative commentators say that Verses 4-9 are the voice of the Messiah speaking / For us that means Jesus is speaking. We certainly see that in the way the text foretells the way **[Jesus was going to be treated]**

- The beating in vs 6³
- The pulling out of the beard vs 6⁴
- The mocking and spitting in vs 6⁵
- The disgrace in vs 7 (Crucified naked on the cross)
- The resolve in vs 7⁶
- God's vindication in vs 8⁷

All of these are fulfilled in Jesus' last week. In addition to foretelling the last few days of the Messiah, I mentioned that our text provides the most compelling reason for us to learn how to listen to God and that is the Main Point of this sermon - Jesus tells us that He needed to learn to listen to his Father. And the corollary to that is - So do we. We see Jesus telling us this several times in our text. We see in versus 4 and 5 how Jesus is saying that the Father woke His ear up and the Father opened His ear. But why. Jesus tells us. To Listen. And why does Jesus say He needed to have His ear opened to listen? Again, Jesus tells us:

- Jesus needed to learn to listen to His Father because His ears were plugged and asleep and needed to be **[opened and then daily re-awakened]**. (vs 5)
- Jesus needed to learn to listen to His Father because He didn't know how to speak the word that **[sustains the weary]** (vs 4)
- Jesus needed to learn to listen because He needed not just a one time opening of His ears to hear but because of the world around him continually put His ear to sleep – so He needed it **[every day]** (vs 4)

Let's unpack each of these subpoints

³ John 19:1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.

⁴ Leviticus 19:27 'Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard.

⁵ Matt 27:29 Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said.; Matt 26:67 ⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him; 27:30 ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.

⁶ Luke 9:51 ⁵¹ As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

⁷ 1 Timothy 3:16 He appeared in the flesh, was **vindicated** by the Spirit

Jesus ears needed to be wakened and opened

In verses 4 & 5 The Sovereign LORD ... [wakens my ear to listen ...has opened my ears]. What??? I get that my ears need to be opened – but Jesus' ears? Part of our problem with this is that we don't understand the humanity of Jesus deeply enough. Andre spoke of that in last week's sermon when talking about Jesus agonizing in prayer. He said: "We underestimate Jesus' humanity." I would say that if we think that Jesus had a perfectly clear channel to the Father, we underestimate His humanity.

In the Westminster Confession – one of the great doctrinal statements of the reformation we read – Jesus took "upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin:" Having stopped ears / Having the need to open our ears is one of our infirmities. There is no question that our ears are plugged and our hearts are closed to much of what God is trying to say to us. Jesus inherited that.

We need to remember that it is not a sin to have a closed ear to the Holy Spirit's leading and conviction and speaking to us. It is part of our nature.

And having our ears opened can be painful. Painful to see how dense I was. Painful to see all of the missed opportunity because I wasn't paying attention to the Spirit's leading. In our case having an ear that blocks hearing God's word can result in sin. But not for Jesus.

Notice what the Messiah Jesus says in vs 5: "The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears;

[I have not been rebellious,
I have not turned away.]"

Jesus did not turn away from the process of having His ears opened.

Let me see if I can illustrate how my ear to God needs to be opened. As I mentioned, I was trained as an engineer and by temperament I think like an engineer. Some of you who know engineers know what I am talking about – especially if you are married to one. But we have a certain way of looking at things. We tend to not be sensitive to the needs of others. We are more interested in things than people.

I really identify with Dilbert – Scott Adams cartoon about engineers – He makes me laugh at myself. But sometimes he hits home. Look at this cartoon:

[Dilbert cartoon]

Dilbert visits a co-worker named Yvonne to obtain some numbers. He returns with them and brings them to Alice. Alice asks: How's Yvonne doing with the sextuplets now that her house has burned down and she had shoulder surgery?

Dilbert responds: It didn't come up.

I cannot tell you the number of times my wife has asked me about something important about someone I just was with and I say "It didn't come up."

But, there is hope. I am a living testimony of one who is having his engineering ear opened up. As I spend time with my Father, having my ears opened, I am learning to be more sensitive. I am caring more about people. And it is good.

Left to ourselves, A stopped ear is just part of the common infirmities that we all share. So Jesus too, since he took upon himself these common infirmities, his ears were stopped and needed to be opened. Maybe not an engineering ear but the ear of a carpenter.

Jesus needed to learn how to [sustain the weary]

In verse 4 we see that Jesus was given a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. Who were the weary that Jesus ministered to?:

- Woman at the well
- Woman caught in adultery
- All those he healed
- All those he delivered

One of the amazing things about how Jesus sustained the weary was how there was no set formula to the way He spoke with people. Each person was dealt with individually. Even to our marvel

Some of you may have heard of [Art Katz]. He was raised Jewish but became a Marxist / Atheist. Some of you may have read his first book Ben Israel which means Son of Israel which documents his story of coming to faith. Art knew the OT law from his upbringing. But someone challenged him to read the New Testament starting with the Gospel of John. When he got to the story of the woman caught in adultery he closed the book and started thinking:

The law said that the woman must be stoned. Yet Jesus had been teaching forgiveness, and earlier in the Book had actually said, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Jesus was trapped.

... What would I say in Jesus' place? I searched my mind, exhausting my resources of logic and reason and finally conceded there was no answer. Fully expecting the worst, I reopened the book and read on. I found Jesus bending over, poking His finger in the dirt.

.. And then came His answer, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." I gasped. A sword had been plunged deep into my own being. It was numbing and shocking, yet thrilling, because the answer was so utterly perfect. It defied cerebral examination. It cut across every major issue I had ever anguished upon in my life. Truth. Justice. Righteousness. Integrity. I knew that what I had read transcended human knowledge and comprehension. It had to be divine."

How did Jesus know what to say? Was it His understanding of Scripture? Art Katz was well versed in the Hebrew scriptures. He had a brilliant mind. He couldn't come up with a response.

I believe our text today answers that: Jesus learned what to say in situations – not out of his divine power, but because as a man, His Father taught him the words that would sustain the weary.

We hear Jesus himself teaching how he knew what to say and what to do in specific situations in three different passages from **[John's gospel]**:

- I. John 5:19 ... "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.
- II. John 8:28 So Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught me.
- III. John 12:49 ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me." ESV

Let's not be too quick to jump over this. When does Jesus see the Father doing things that Jesus imitates? When did the Father teach Jesus how and what to speak. In his pre-incarnational state (ie when He was with the Father in heaven before He came to earth) or while He walked the earth? Did he retain any memory of His pre-incarnational state? Jesus' high priestly prayer seems to indicate that Jesus knew of the glory He had with the Father before the incarnation – but that could have been revealed rather than remembered.

From the immediate context we cannot be sure – but if we apply our understanding of embryology and today's text I think we can draw a very probable conclusion – Jesus was once a single cell in Mary's body. His brain developed inside Mary's womb. Neural connections were made as His brain developed. Did the Father implant the memories while in the womb or did He learn them from the Father while He walked the earth?

[Luke 2:46] Certainly we see the 12 year old Jesus doing two things in the temple. What were they?

[Congregation]

sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

- Listening
- Asking Questions

That doesn't sound like someone who had all this knowledge pre-programmed in His brain. Also if we couple these three statements of Jesus from John with our text today I think it is safe to assume that Jesus learned to minister by:

- Seeing what His Father was doing
- Speaking the things His father taught Him

And these were all learned while he was on earth. From the OT scriptures alone, Jesus could not have learned what to say in all of the specific situations He faced. He learned the great principles from the Hebrew scriptures and then the specifics He learned by having his ear opened to listen to His Father. This is where I might differ with some of my brothers and sisters – they might agree that Jesus had his ears opened – but it was to the written word of God. But this is where you, as good Bereans, should weigh this for yourself.

I think we can agree that we need help with our words and our Heavenly Father knows the word that each person needs.

Jesus needed to learn to listen daily

Finally our text in verse 4: He wakens me [morning by morning], wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.

Now I don't want to make a case for only having Your times alone with God in the morning. God has made some of us morning people / some night people. Also God has placed all of us in various seasons – sometimes we spend our time alone with God in the morning and then for a season we spend it at night or at noon. It doesn't matter.

And actually in Jesus life, the Gospels record that he got away to be with His Father all times of the day – not just in the morning. But for Jesus – we see in our text a repetition – morning by morning. If we are serious about following Jesus in learning to listen, it won't happen in just a few times alone with him. We see in the gospels that it was Jesus habit or custom to get to a secluded place to pray. Luke 22 ³⁹ And he came

out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. The gospels record 11 times when Jesus got away to be alone with His Father⁸

Let's stop a minute – Have you ever asked yourself what did Jesus do during those long times of prayer? Did He bring his Bible with him? He did not bring the scrolls that were kept in the synagogue – but He brought what He had memorized.

And here's another question: Was it a one way monologue with His Father or was it two – way dialog. Again – the Gospels are silent about what went on – so this is my opinion, but I think our text today gives us a peek into what went on. Jesus learned to listen – Listen to the Father's voice as recorded in the Old Testament from the words that He had memorized and listened to the still small voice of His Father. Here again is where I differ with some people I deeply respect. They would say that Jesus was learning to listen to God speaking through the written word of God.

Application

- What about you?
- What are your take aways?
- What do you need to learn about Listening?

⁸ Matthew 14 ¹³ Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself;

Matthew 14 ²³ After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

Matthew 15:29 “Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there.”

Mark 1:12 At once the Spirit sent [Jesus] out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.”

Mark 1:35 And rising very early in the **morning**, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Luke 6:12 “Jesus went out to a mountain side to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him.

Mark 6:31-32 “Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to [his disciples], ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.”

Mark 6 ⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. ⁴⁶ After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land.

Luke 5:16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

Luke 11:1 “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place.

Luke 9¹⁸ And it happened that while He was praying alone,

John 6¹⁵ So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

Closing Story

In 2007 [Joshua Bell], one of the best violinists of this era, donned a Washington Nationals cap and played 6 Bach violin concertos on his 3.5 million dollar Stradivarius in a Metro station in DC. 1000 people passed by. Only 7 stopped to Listen.

Will we stop our frantic pace and listen to the Master? The Messiah tells us that the Father opened His ear and He was not rebellious and did not turn back. He allowed the work of the Father to open His ear. Will we?

The Master Musician of the Universe plays for us every day. Will we stop to listen? But not just stop. If we stop will we learn to hear the intricacies of the music, intimacies He will whisper in our ear? Will we stop and learn to listen to the Master's voice?

Time of Silence

Father, what would you have me take away from this?