

Listening as God Speaks

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If God spoke to you, would you listen? Really listening is more than just hearing the sounds. It is entering into a positive relationship, one of respect and love. Such a relationship with God leads to obedience as well, doing the things that will please and honor Him. So if God spoke to you, would you listen, really?

This has been the key issue for human beings since the very beginning, as we may see throughout Scripture.

I. God's Original Plan for Human Beings

Today let's begin where the Bible begins, in the first three chapters of Genesis. There in the briefest descriptive sketch Moses lays out before us the origins of our world. His crowning act was the creation of humans, made in the image of God. They were expressly created for the purpose of living a flawless and unlimited life in full communion with the Creator Himself. No other earthly creature would enjoy such privilege.

But, as always, privilege brings with it responsibility. God placed in human hands the management of the planet's perfectly synchronized and matched natural environment. We marvel that such opportunity was given to Adam and Eve, that the process of all nature should rest in their domain.

How could two people so recently brought into existence manage such an assignment? God would take it upon Himself to help them, guiding them personally every step of the way. We can scarcely grasp the significance of such personal intimacy with the Creator of the universe. For any question there would be an answer--not simply a reply, but counsel of divine wisdom, not only for the moment but laced with wisdom that could short-circuit the very processes of cause and effect. It was flawless guidance. But it would benefit them only if they would listen to what God said.

II. The Plan is Derailed

Starting from this kind of privilege, their descent into sin takes on a vast significance. What was involved was not merely the taking of a fruit, although that carried significance of its own because it represented departure from God's way and asserting their own will. They refused to listen, to heed, as God spoke. Sad to say, our culture tends strongly to minimize if not ridicule the entire story. In western culture the whole report gets lightly dismissed in jokes, mocking the very idea that misuse of a fruit should carry such grave importance. From today's human perspective many view things that way, but they do not see as God sees.

In this act of self-serving independence our first parents shattered not only their innocence but the intended order of nature. Life changed. Genesis 3 records the parting conference between the first humans and the Lord as He laid before them the grinding consequences of failing to listen, of breaking away from God's way, separating from His presence. Now the once-friendly earth would bring forth thorns and thistles. Fear and conflict would invade the animal kingdom, a new social

relationship would impact the human family, and the first couple would find themselves expelled from the only home they had ever known. They would now go out alone into a chilling, inhospitable world of toil and tears. But worst of all, the comforting connection with God was fading away. They were on their own in a wild land.

III. God's Plan for Restoration

Before they set out to begin the struggle for a new kind of life--one that included the consequences of sin, with death at its end--the merciful Creator filled their cup, especially that of Eve, with a message of ultimate hope. It was the first truly biblical prophecy--one set before Adam and Eve by God in person, which today we share by reading the Scriptures. While Adam and Eve listened speechless, God turned to Satan, who was masquerading behind the form of the serpent, to set forth in cryptic language his future: "'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel'" (Genesis 3:15). So in the conflict between Christ and Satan, the evil one would have his day at Calvary, but in the end he would be destroyed.

As she listened, and forever after, this promise must have consoled Eve, with whom the sad story of sin here on earth had begun. Within her line of offspring would come the Deliverer who, although suffering the consequences of the wrong choices she and Adam had made, would finally bring an end to the deceiver, terminating his career of sin. With this ray of hope in hand, the first couple walked away from Eden alone, with the shadow of sin's gloomy barrier standing between them and God. The close tie they had enjoyed with God was broken.

In intense sorrow God witnessed His beloved creatures now starting on an uncertain pilgrimage through a fallen and often dangerous world. In that first generation even murder would enter their now-troubled lives when they stumbled upon their son's body, crumpled on the ground, victim of his own brother Cain. What bitter, irrepressible tears must have fallen as they gathered up the limp body for burial. They seemed alone, but in truth they were not abandoned. They were God's beloved children whom He could never forget. Before disappearing beyond the shadows, God reached out to establish one last line of immediate contact through the prophetic gift. Although He was now distanced from the human family, guidance and counsel would yet come from Him to His creatures. He would do this through His prophets. Perhaps His people would listen as God spoke through the prophets.

IV. Prophetic Communication from God

Abraham is the first person called a prophet in Scripture, given the title by God Himself (Genesis 20:7). God communicated with Abraham and even called on him to prefigure God's own sacrifice in giving His beloved Son (Genesis 22). Isaac was spared at the last moment, but generations of believers since have better understood God's heart and His great sacrifice as they read the amazing story of an earthly father and son, whose very lives seemed a prophecy of God's saving grace. And Abraham set a right example in listening to God's voice. God said of him, "'Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws'" (Genesis 26:5).

Many years later, Israel was at last on the verge of the promised land. The compassionate heavenly Father moved His aging servant Moses to speak to Joshua, his coming successor, before the assembled people, with words of supreme comfort. Moses had been their prophetic leader. After an arduous journey across the desert, during which ten times they had revolted against his leadership, Moses spoke, "The Lord is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8). The gift of prophecy called them to obedience and gave them the assurance of God's continued leading and care.

Other prophets also pointed the people to God, reproved their sins, and urged them to repentance. But most precious of all were the messages that assured them of God's continued care. Isaiah conveyed these comforting words from God: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). Jeremiah told them of God's attitude toward them: "For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope'" (Jeremiah 29:11). How well they listened to what God was telling them would determine whether God's good plans could be fulfilled. The prophets faithfully gave them the divine messages and the assurance of God's loving interest.

As a token of His abiding presence, the same message echoes in the ears of God's New Testament people, pilgrims still moving toward the city whose builder and maker is God. So the message of the apostle comes to us who follow the footsteps of Jesus, "For He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

So what does all this mean to us today? By implanting the gift of prophecy in His beloved people, activated from time to time according to His will, the great Creator maintains among us a continuing contact to guide and encourage us His people. Time after time He has spoken through His prophets, and we are the ones who benefit from those messages recorded in the Scriptures. There, too, we find frequent records of other prophets. Moved by the Spirit of God, these acted to serve the needs of local times and places. They were not called upon to write Scriptures, but in every way their service was a genuine ministry of God.

V. The Ongoing Nature of the Gift

In four New Testament passages the apostle Paul cites the prophetic gift as one of the most important gifts of the Spirit. Since the very beginning, prophecy has provided a reliable channel carrying God's messages to His people. We might ask, How long should we expect this gift to continue? True, the Scriptures are complete, but our need for guidance from God never ceases. Paul's response to our question is explicit. The prophetic gift is given "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

As long as we keep progressing toward the fullness of Christ, so long will His prophetic gift remain as He sees wise to initiate it. In the history of the prophetic gift's manifestation, we see a clear pattern. The gift is expressed most fully at times when the people of God face serious decisions or peril.

The coming of Jesus the Messiah sparked a dramatic outpouring of God's prophetic gift that brought into existence the entire New Testament in a little more than 50 years. The climax of the ages had come, the time when the Kinsman-Redeemer of those who love the Lord was appearing to confront Satan on his home turf. Devils hounded Jesus' every step and rejoiced as He went to the cross. But His was the victory, Satan was overcome and doomed, and liberty was won for Satan's captives. Jesus' resurrection sealed an end to the conflict of the ages, and although He was bruised in heel, His triumph at Calvary administered the final blow to Satan. With that the first prophecy given to Adam and Eve met its fulfillment.

So we see that the prophetic gift remains for the people of God to the day of His coming. This promise takes new power as we keep in mind the fact that the God who created Adam and Eve and who inspired Abraham, Moses, and the other prophets came among us in human form. Here was the ultimate revelation of Himself to us. Born miraculously of a virgin, He entered the human family to demonstrate forever the depth of His love for His creatures. Beyond this, He went to the cross to secure by His blood a future for us in eternal life.

It was this same Christ who, at the beginning of earth's history, pronounced the mighty words that brought us into existence, the same who formed us from the dust and breathed into our nostrils that electrifying breath of life--the supreme gift of all gifts. Along this same theme Paul writes to the Colossian believers, "He is the image of the invisible God For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible . . . all things have been created through Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:15, 16).

So in all we have been thinking about, Jesus Christ is our everlasting benefactor, our Creator, our Redeemer, and our coming King. While we await His return we have become His special people in an age when human history will reach its end. Jesus is returning. At this time of special crisis He has seen fit once more to provide communications for His people through the prophetic gift. Ellen G. White has come among us as His messenger to prepare us and to guide us through the turbulent times sweeping up to His return. We will reap great benefit by listening to His message for His remnant people, those who treasure the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

In the whirl of activity that marks our modern world, the real question is whether we seek to hear the messages of God in the Bible and in the work of His non-canonical prophet, Ellen White. Today we have an opportunity to listen and to heed the messages from Him.

Jesus is coming. Soon the need for the prophetic gift will cease as we enter the presence of God once more. All that was lost in Eden is to be restored in the Kingdom of God. Our task is to make sure that we listen to His voice now and are clothed in the garments of His grace at His appearing. What could be more important than this?

Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

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