

HEARING HIS VOICE

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"He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice."

John 10:4

Some years ago I was conducting an evangelistic campaign in Malawi, Central Africa along with my old friend and ministry companion in those days, Chief Hardwick Adam Kachaje. He is known throughout the country as "Mfumu Thumba", presiding Chief of Thumba Village and district. Throughout his 82 years he has been a farmer, politician, schoolteacher and preacher. "The Chief" and I have traveled from one end of that country to the other preaching the Gospel. One day we were holding a meeting out under some trees in a remote area - "out in the bush". We were using a sound system powered by a portable generator so that people in the surrounding area could hear and come. Nothing unusual about that. But on that day something VERY unusual happened. I was preaching and Hardwick was interpreting for me. The sound system would usually reach out to a maximum distance of about a half-mile, depending on weather conditions. But this day it miraculously went much further.

Eight Kilometers (five miles) away there was a man sitting in a bar drinking with his friends. Seems that there is always a drinking establishment available no matter how remote the area may be. Amazingly, even above the noise of the bar, a very faint, yet recognizable voice came into his ears. It was the voice of his old schoolteacher from his childhood days long ago. Later he gave this testimony, "I was in the bar drinking and I heard a voice that was very faint yet very familiar to me. As I listened I realized it was Mr. Kachaje, my grammar school teacher. All of a sudden I could not resist, I had to get up and go toward the voice. I began walking and then I began running and as I was running toward the voice it became clearer and I began to understand what he was saying. My old teacher was preaching the Gospel and when I arrived he was asking people to receive Jesus. I had heard every word as I ran and they had gone into my heart. When he asked people to pray, I did, and I received Jesus into my heart. I was saved right then and there. The voice of my old teacher was faint, but thank God it drew me to Jesus."

Now, you may ask - how could that man hear the voice of the Chief as far away as five miles - and - how could he recognize a faint far away voice he had not heard in over twenty years? I cannot answer the first question, but I can answer the second. He could recognize the voice because he had spent years in the presence of the Chief listening to his voice every day. He recognized it because he had spent so much TIME LISTENING to it.

One day not long ago Sheila and I were conducting a meeting in an open-air market in Kenya and I noticed something that really got my attention. The meeting was over and while the guys were packing up I walked away from the market about a hundred yards. Sheila was talking with the team while they packed. There was a lot of noise in the market - people talking, vendors shouting, music blaring and so on. Sheila was speaking in a normal tone of voice, and yet above all that jumbled noise there was one single voice that stood out in my ears and was very clear - hers. Why? Because I have spent 39 years daily in her presence - LISTENING to her. I know her voice because I am accustomed to HEARING it.

I have a good friend here in Adamsville named Mike and he has a beautiful old yellow lab named Zema. We were sitting out on his porch the other night, as we often do, and Zema was laying on the rug. Sheila called her name but she didn't move. Not even a twitch of her ear. I called her name - no response. Sheila called her in a louder tone - nothing. Then Mike very quietly said, "Zema." With that she bolted up and sat in front of him! Why? She KNOWS the voice. Why? Because she spends hours every day LISTENING to Mike's voice. If he goes hunting, Zema goes. If he goes to grade lumber, Zema goes. She responds to him because she KNOWS him.

Dear friend, essential to the Christian life is KNOWING the voice of The Master. And the only way to KNOW His voice is to spend TIME LISTENING to it. There is no short cut. Now that brings me to this question - DO YOU SPEND TIME WITH GOD? I am not asking if you spend time reading the Bible and devotion books, or going to church and Bible studies, or watching preachers on television, or having fellowship with other Christians. I am asking if you spend quiet, unhurried, uncluttered, personal, private time with God alone - getting to know HIM, learning to recognize HIS voice?

How do you hear the voice of God? It is not with your intellect or your emotions or with your physical hearing - it is with your spirit, your inner man. Human beings are three-part creatures, body, soul and spirit (1 Thessalonians. 5:23), and out of the three parts only one is actually born again - the spirit. The spirit of man has never been touched by satan and cannot be. It is reserved for God. The Old Testament Temple is a type of man. The outer court represents the body, the inner court, the soul (intellect - emotions - will) and the Holy of Holies, the spirit. Only the High Priest could go into the Most Holy Place and only by the blood of the sacrificial lamb. It was the secret residing place of God. Dear Christian, there is a secret place where you and I can go and meet with God, a place where satan cannot interfere or overhear our conversations. He cannot go because he does not have the blood of the Lamb - but we can

because we do. We must learn to listen with the ears of our spirit. That, however, requires TIME and as I said, there is no short cut.

The Bible gives us a wonderful promise and assurance for our daily walk with God in Isaiah 30:21, *“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”* The catch, however, is that we must know how to recognize the voice of the One Who is speaking the word. 1 Kings 19:11-12 tells us that we need not expect the voice to be loud or to be revealed in wind, earthquake and fire. Rather, it will be a *“still small voice”*. It is only detectable to the attentive spirit of the Child of God who is waiting before Him. Dear Christian, how can you obey a voice you cannot hear or recognize? How can you receive comfort and encouragement from a voice you do not know? John 10:4-5 tells us that the sheep follow the Shepherd and they know the difference between his voice and that of a stranger for one reason - because from their birth they have spent time in His presence LISTENING to Him.

Let me ask you again, do you spend time with God - yes or no? Do you set aside time at the beginning of your day for God? Is there room in your schedule to meet with the Heavenly Committee every morning? There was in the life of Jesus! Mark 1:35 tells us, *“And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.”* Dear friends, if Jesus Christ the Son of God found it necessary in His humanity to spend private time in prayer and worship with the Father at the beginning of HIS day, then what about you and me?! The answer is obvious.

In Psalm 63:1 David wrote, *“O God Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee.”* In Genesis 19:27 we read that *“Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord.”* In Job 1:5 we see that the man God called “perfect and upright” *“rose up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings.”* Look at the lives of Jacob, Gideon, Samuel, David, Jehoshaphat and on and on. What did they all have in common? They all spent time with God at the first part of the day in private worship.

Look at the lives of those throughout Christian history who have made the greatest impact for God. Martin Luther said, *“If I fail to spend three hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.”* Adoniram Judson, pioneer missionary to Burma, advised, *“Arrange thy affairs if possible so that thou canst leisurely devote two or three hours every day not merely to devotional exercises, but to the very act of secret prayer and communion with God.”* Robert Murray McCheyne wrote, *“I ought to pray before seeing anyone. I feel it is better to begin with God - to see His face first, to get my soul near Him before it is near another.”* James Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission spent at least two hours every morning in prayer, beginning at 4:00am. C.T. Studd, pioneer missionary to Congo, Africa did the same, as well as George Muller of Bristol. E.M. Bounds wrote, *“The men who have done the most for God in this world have been early on their knees. If God is not first in our thoughts and efforts in the morning, He will be in the last place the rest of the day.”* Dear friend, why do you think these men and others like them had such an impact on the world for Christ? It is because they were full of faith, and THAT is because they spent TIME in the presence of God cultivating the ears of their heart, honing their ability to HEAR the voice of God.

Do you want to have an impact for God in this world? Do you want to walk by faith? Do you want to live a life that is pleasing to your Heavenly Father? There is only one way - you must spend time with Him and learn to hear His voice. The Bible tells us in Romans 10:17, *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”* There are two words in New Testament Greek for “word”. One is *logos* which means the written Word of God. It is the general revelation of God, the “said word”. The other word is *rhema*, which means the living word or the “saying word”. The word in Romans 10:17 is *rhema*. Faith comes by hearing the word of God spoken into your heart by the Holy Spirit. *Rhema* is the Word of God applied to your personal life in specific situations. The voice of God is revealed to us through His word and by His Spirit. It is His word spoken to us in our spirit, in our inner man - not our intellect, that reveals to us His will. It is knowledge of His will that enables us to act in faith, to walk by faith. And according to Hebrews 11:6 it is living by faith that enables us to please Him. It all begins with hearing, recognizing and obeying His voice. That takes TIME.

Now, you might say, *“Yes I know all this is true, but there is just no way I can get up early enough to spend an hour or two with God. My schedule just will not allow it.”* Well, let me ask you this - if Bill Gates called you and told you he was going to give you one million dollars, but to receive it you would have to meet him at the Waffle House at 4:00am and talk with him for two hours - would you go? I guarantee you would! Why? Because it would be “worth it” to you. Dear Child of God I promise you that there are far greater riches waiting for you in the presence of God than in the presence of Bill Gates. I have learned that, for the most part, people do what they WANT to do. It was “worth it” to Jesus to meet with His Father in the first part of the day. It was “worth it” to David, to Hudson Taylor, to others who have impacted the world. Is it worth it to you? Yes it is!

How do you begin? You just begin. Don't look for a plan. Don't try to get organized. You don't need a plan - you need a decision. Set your clock, get out of bed, pick a place and DO IT. The Heavenly Committee (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are always in session and They are waiting on you to join Them. Determine in your heart that you are going to join Them tomorrow morning and you are going learn to KNOW and HEAR and OBEY the voice of God. Pray this prayer, **“Dear Father, I confess I have neglected You, but those days are over - from now on You will have the FIRST, the BEST and the MOST. I WILL learn to hear Your voice and I WILL obey You by faith. In Jesus' precious Name I pray. Amen.**

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