

## **“Encouraging Reminders”**

Today we come to the close of our series on hearing God's voice. I hope and pray that it's been encouraging to you. As we've worked our way through the past five Sundays, we've been coming at this topic from a number of directions. The hope has been, in so doing, that we can somehow (in our own faith-walk) with Christ get a better handle on how it is (God speaks) to us and how we can (as followers of Jesus) hear and pay attention to whatever it is God might be saying.

The whole concept of hearing God's voice is one that, at least from our end, on this side, (we need to be honest) we'll never fully come to understand or realize, and for some obvious reasons. God doesn't speak in the ways that you and I speak. We don't audibly hear his voice as you are audibly (at this moment) hearing mine. Nonetheless, he does speak to us and he does (when he speaks) enable us to hear and understand.

Much of our time has been framed around what we've been referring to as Kairos moments. Kairos moments are those times when we sense that God is wanting to tell us something; those moments in life when God is working to get our attention and calling us to listen.

In the Bible, when a Kairos moment happens, something's happening that needs a response. God's saying something that he wants us to hear. And it's in the response to whatever it is that's happening (God is saying) that we take (or not) a step of faith.

Now, without going through everything we've talked about in this series, we've touched on a number of ways in which God chooses to speak. He speaks to us in his Word. First and foremost, when you spend time in the Bible, listening to it (in a sermon), your devotional life, whatever form it takes. Don't be surprised (when it's happening) if you somehow (in some way) hear God's voice. God speaks to us in his Word. He's promised to speak when it happens.

He also speaks to us in and through other people; most often (we've said), in and through a community of faith like this. Godly wisdom, godly advice, God-directed influence and encouragement (and guidance) oftentimes come through people who are in the same faith-walk in their own lives. Again, (just like with his Word) don't be surprised when it happens and (when it happens) don't ignore the wisdom (and the voice) that comes. It might well be the voice of God.

In his Word, through the community of faith, (some of the other things we've talked about), through doors that open and close, in a still small voice, in going after in life not just the good things we see, but the God-things that become clear.

There are a number of ways (we've touched on) in this series in which God speaks. And we've (even said) that when he doesn't and we hear nothing, then the calling (we're given) is to do what we know (he's called us to do) and he's already said, and to not worry about what we do not yet know.

Today, as we come to the close, I don't want to add to the list of the ways in which God speaks. God can speak to us in countless ways. It would be (a long series) if we touched on all of it. Instead, what I want to do is to touch on a few bottom-line takeaways that (I hope) will serve as helpful reminders (to all of us) as we think about and strive to hear God's voice.

I want to keep it real simple today. We read three passages from God's Word. Let's pull out one simple lesson from each of the three; three bottom line “encouraging reminders” when it comes to hearing God's voice.

Here's the first: God's ways are always good. (God's ways are always good.) Even when we don't see them coming, even when we don't agree with what God is doing (or saying) and wouldn't have chosen it for ourselves, God's ways in every situation (in every case) are always good.

From the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, the fifty-fifth chapter, (our first reading today), the prophet writes: “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”

The prophet starts with a word of encouragement. He starts with an encouragement to follow the Lord. Turn from what's wrong in your life (he says) and follow what's right. Confess the mistakes in your life (he

says) and trust in God's forgiveness. It's an encouraging word to follow; a word of encouragement to follow what's right.

From there (he says), "For my thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways...(For) as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts..."

Now, let's stop for a moment and put what we just read into the context of (our series) on hearing God's voice. Did you hear what the prophet said? Did you notice what's being proclaimed about the way in which God works?

Let me put it another way. Have you wondered why when you pray for something (over here) that the answer God gives is over here? Have you ever thought about why it is that when you think the best answer (to your prayer) and life-situation might be this, that the answer that keeps (coming back) from God is that?

God's thoughts are not your thoughts. God's ways are not your ways. If they were, there'd be no reason to pray. If they were, there'd be nothing God would have to give. But they're not, and so we do. They are not, and so there is.

I could give you a long list of answers to prayers in my life, times when I've listened for God's voice, where I thought (the answer) would be obvious. There was no question in my mind, given what I knew and what I could see, what was best. Only as time went on and life (played itself out), did I come to realize that the answers God gave were actually better. The things God knew (and God could see) went far beyond was possible for me in my limited perspective.

In listening for the voice of God, this encouraging reminder is simple. No matter how simple (the situation) might seem, be ready for an answer that doesn't come back so simply. Sometimes we have it all figured out. Sometimes (to us) it seems so easy: a nice and neatly-wrapped and packaged (and pre-planned) approach to life.

Don't be surprised. God's answers are not as simple as ours, and they're certainly not as nicely and neatly wrapped and packaged and (easily lived-out) as we'd like. But they are always (without exception) and in every situation and case, answers that are good.

"As the rain and snow come down from heaven (God says), and do not return to it without watering the earth...so is my word that goes from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

As I look back on my years of ministry (here at St. Timothy's) and on my more than 63 years of life as a child of God, I am so thankful that God has not always allowed me to have my way. So many gifts, so many blessings, so much faith and growth and life-change that has happened (and taken place) as a result of what God has done.

In listening for God's voice, don't be surprised by the voice you hear. And when you hear it and you (test it) against his Word and in the community of faith, and it continues to come back the same, then don't fight it. Follow it and believe it and trust it, even (if and when) it doesn't fit what you were thinking (and planning) for your life. If it's God's voice, then it's a good voice and it can be trusted, because God's ways are always good. That's the first reminder.

Let me give you a second: God's voice always leads to peace. God's voice always leads to peace. Even when it's not peaceful, even when life seems to be falling apart, God's voice (as it works in life) always leads to peace.

From our second lesson today, Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter four. The apostle writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

This is so basic, but it's so easily forgotten. It's so fundamental to the relationship we have with God, but it's one of those things that we can't say enough. If you want to hear God's voice, don't forget that he wants (first) to hear yours. If you want him to speak into your life, don't be afraid to speak (to him) about what's happening in your life.

It's like a parent with a child. The parent is there to help, but not if the help isn't wanted. (It does no good.) It's like a coach with a player on the team. The help is there. It's only a voice (or a request) away. But if

the request never comes (and the desire for learning) is not there, it doesn't matter. Only as it's voiced (and requested) and wanted is the one who can actually help brought into the game.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but pray about everything. Whatever's going on in your life (Paul says), bring your requests to God." Talk about a sermon series. We could preach for weeks on the things that cause anxiety in life.

Anybody (here today) anxious about life? Any one (here today) who has things in your life beyond your control? There's an answer to your anxiety, and his name is Jesus. There's a control that is there, and his name is Christ.

But if it's not voiced, it won't happen. If it's not requested (and desired) it'll never come. But when it is and it does, (you present your requests to God), "the peace of God which transcends all of our understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

I'll be fully transparent on this one. I don't know how it works, but I know it does. I don't know what causes it to happen, but it happens, and there is a cause, and it comes from God.

The peace of God which goes beyond anything we'll ever be able to understand. This isn't a "nice on paper" theory that never makes its way into life. This is a life reality that goes beyond anything we could ever put down on paper.

And it doesn't matter what's happening in your life. It's not dependent upon whether (or not) everything else is good. More often than not, it's not. I've lived long enough to know that the troubles of this life don't simply go away when you follow Jesus. Sometimes they increase. It's not that simple.

But there's a peace in God's voice that is found nowhere else in the world. There's a peace in God's word (and response) to our requests that can be yours, if only you make the time to ask.

I'd challenge you this week to spend time with God in prayer...and not just a moment, but actually spend some time. Lay it all out. Put it on the table. Let your requests (and your heart) and your anxieties be known to him. And see if he doesn't respond with a word that gives you peace.

Encouraging reminders: God's ways are always good. God's voice always leads to peace. And, from our (gospel reading) this morning, God's presence is an everyday promise.

Not long before Jesus was to go to the cross to pay the price for our sin, he left his disciples with a promise of what they could expect when he was gone. In John chapter fourteen, Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He shared with them the promise of a Counselor who would be there to guide and lead them in life. And he gave to them the assurance that no matter what happens in life, they are never alone.

As we consider this whole idea of how and where and (in what ways) God speaks, and as we think about what it means for us to live as followers of Jesus and to respond to those Kairos moments when we're sensing God is speaking to us, and as we come to the close of this series on hearing God's voice, I cannot help but be reminded of the connection there is (in all of this) between God's love for us in Christ and the response we make in faith to him.

I don't want to make this sound too simple because, (as we've been saying), it's not always as simple as it might sound. And I certainly don't want to give the impression that what we do (and how we respond) to God's voice (in life) doesn't matter, because it does. At the same time, I don't want us to make this too complicated (and complex), and I certainly don't want us to over-think it so much that we end up doing nothing and stay stuck.

The Christian life is a combination of understanding what God has done, how (in Christ Jesus) alone we are saved; of allowing God's voice to guide us (and lead us) in life no matter where we are and what we're facing; and then to respond (in faith) to what and where and how we believe he is leading, knowing that whatever we do and wherever we go, we are not alone.

Here's the bottom line in this series on hearing God's voice. Here's the final takeaway in these weeks of trying to understand how it all works. And it's the same thing we said (when we started) back in week one.

This only works as we trust in what God has promised. This only becomes real as we take this "hearing God's voice" idea and apply it and (make it real) in life.

When those Kairos moments come – whether it's through his Word, through the community of faith (we call the Church), through doors that open and close, in that still small voice, in going after in life not just the good things we see, but the God-things that become clear, and even when we don't know what he is saying –

whatever it is and however it comes, when it comes, it always calls for a response. And when we respond, in every situation, God promises that we're never alone.

So here's the choice we have. Here's the choice you have. God will speak. God does speak. And if we are listening, we will hear; you will hear. And when we hear, when you hear, you have a choice.

You can either hear what he says and choose to ignore it, do nothing and figure it out yourself...or you can listen to it and respond to it and step out in faith. If you do (and when you do), be encouraged.

God's ways are always good. God's voice always leads to peace. And God's presence (in your life) is an everyday promise. The choice is yours. Amen.