

“Why doesn’t God speak to us like He did in the Bible?”

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Opening Prayer

Good morning, and welcome here to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. I am Pastor Jacob Hanson, and I am delighted that you have chosen to come and worship with us today. If you are new or this is your first time here in a while, a special welcome to you... I hope that you will find our congregation to be loving, friendly, and most importantly God-filled. We are in the middle of a very important sermon series that is dedicated to answering your questions. We put out a survey of 29 questions with a space for a write in, and we asked you as the congregation to submit your top six for answering. In your bulletin you can see a list of the upcoming topics, as we are moving from the seventh most requested to the first. Last week we appropriately started this by talking about salvation, today we really begin the tough questions by looking at “why doesn’t God speak to us now like He did in the Bible?” Note that as we get further and further into this series, the more difficult the questions become and the more difficult the answers may be. I want to let you know that if you still have questions or concerns following any of these sermons that you are invited to get in touch with me for some further follow up. Also small groups/adult Sunday School are a great place to ask additional questions from some other knowledgeable Godly men and women. With that being said, we begin talking about our topic today by talking about the way in which God has most clearly spoken to us... in His scriptures.

If we are to talk about how God speaks to us today versus how He spoke to folks in ye olden times, we have to first talk about how there are misconceptions about how God does in fact speak. Often when we hear this question about God speaking to us, we imagine that He in the Old/New Testament spoke continuously to His people in speech,

visions, and dreams. While the Lord did do this, it is not as common as you might think. Our scripture readings from 1st Kings and Exodus show us times where the Lord spoke directly to one of His people... but these times are very far and few between even in scripture. Also worth noting, when God speaks to Elijah, He does so in a still small voice... which is still common today. Elijah had to be listening to hear God's voice. When God spoke to Moses He revealed to Moses who He is and what His plans were... but God didn't audibly do the same to the people Moses was called to reach. God does not often speak in a grandiose and loud way like we think, because He doesn't operate how we do.

Sometimes we get the misconception that He ALWAYS spoke this way (visions, dreams, audible callings) because we will read the Bible and it will show up time after time after time... but we forget that the Bible was written over the course of thousands of years. Make no mistake, God does still speak in crazy ways today... but it isn't quite as often as we are sometimes led to believe. Furthermore, these crazy ways in which God speaks are always backed up by the more common ways in which He talks to us. If you were to think of the ways in which God speaks to us in the form of a pyramid, the profound ways we read about would be at the top. The second part of the pyramid, the middle portion, would be through His people (other Christians) who are imbued with the Holy Spirit. The bottom section, the most common and the base, would be through God's word, the Bible. That is where we start with how God usually speaks with us today.

Our first reading came from 2nd Timothy chapter three. A part of this chapter is fairly well-known. The last two verses in particular are quoted quite often in Christians circles. 2nd Timothy 3:16-17 reads "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be

adequate, equipped for every good work.” In essence what the Apostle Paul is telling Timothy here, is that the scriptures (which have been proven over and over again throughout the centuries to be God-breathed, specifically our 66 books) are the ultimate authority on what God is saying to us. These verses are quoted over and over again, and rightly so, to back up how the scriptures are this ultimate authority. However, the first fifteen verses of this chapter explain why basing our lives upon scripture is so important.

Chapter three begins with “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.” Beloved Congregation, you likely know as I do, that there are those in this world who will claim to hear from God and amass followers for their own profit. People like Benny Hinn and Peter Popoff, who claim to have “God’s healing touch” and to hear from Him all sorts of special things have made millions by falsely claiming to hear God’s voice. This is nothing new, and we should be skeptical of any new teachings and we should put them to the test by using God’s word. The scriptures here, which have been confirmed over and over and over again throughout the millennium, don’t conform to different cultural opinions, to individual thoughts, etc. They are what they are... and they show what is true and what is not. If someone does receive a calling from the Lord, it will always be confirmed by prayer and by scripture. It will never contradict what is in the Bible. In the case of Peter Popoff and Benny Hinn, verse six in 2nd Timothy three speaks directly about them: “For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak

women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses.” Who are these people ultimately scamming? Those who are weak and hurting, those who desperately need help and the truth, those who don’t know any better. Making millions by claiming to heal folks is obviously not in agreement with scripture. Others, such as Joel Olsteen, who claim that they are called to only preach the “love of God” without talking about the tough parts... they too are in violation of the scriptures. It’s all or none Beloved Congregation... the Bible is our base, it is here for a reason, and there is no excess and it all needs to be heard. Scripture is God’s primary way of communicating with you, and reading it is in effect you listening to Him... don’t block Him out by never opening your Bible. However, while scripture is God’s primary way of speaking to us, it certainly is not the only way. He also often speaks to us through our fellow Christians who will talk to us out of the Holy Spirit.

If ever you have a question for the Lord, or if you are looking for an answer to a question, the best place to start is in scripture. With that being said, your fellow Christians are also here for a reason. We were not meant to ever try and go this alone. We need each other, for accountability, for encouragement, for direction. Often the Lord will speak to us through our brethren. The reason why we can trust that the Lord does speak to us through our fellow Christians is because they have the Holy Spirit within them, just as we have the Spirit within us. Our short reading from Ephesians touches on this by saying “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...” Note that we are called here to be on alert for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and that the Holy Spirit within us is an intimate part of that. Furthermore, also take note of the fact that this does not take place in the absence of scripture, as we are told to take

up the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” In other words, while the advice of fellow Christians is good, Holy, and essential to the discernment in our own lives, God will never speak to them in a way that contradicts His holy word. If you come to a place where a believer is saying something and the Bible is saying something else, go with scripture. While the Lord will often speak to us through scripture and through our fellow Christians, it is also true that even today God will potentially speak to us directly as He did to the patriarchs in the Bible. It does still happen today by the Holy Spirit.

Our final reading came from John 14, and it comes directly after our scripture reading from last week about how Jesus tells us to know we have salvation. In this part of the book of John, Jesus’s emphasis is on how we are given the Spirit, and this is a great comfort to us as God’s people. Verses 18-20 speak to this: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” Jesus is assuring His disciples here (and us as well!) that we are not going to be left alone to our own devices. If we are honest, often when we want God to reach out to us the most is when we feel the loneliest or when we are in pain. I would dare to say that most people only ever ask God for anything when they finally realize that they are in absolute need. (Turns out that we are always in need...) But no matter how deep your faith is, when you are in massive amounts of pain, or a loved one is hurting, or death is looming, then we desperately want the Lord to speak to us. Now sometimes the Lord will answer that calling and will appear in some mighty way. There are enough Christians here this morning that I am sure at least a couple of us have experienced a dream, or some kind of phenomenon, where the Lord spoke. However those ways are not promised, even in difficult times. What is promised

is even better as we read in verses 26-27 “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.”

Beloved Congregation, no matter what, the Lord is always speaking to us through the Holy Spirit that dwells within us. We just have to listen, and we have to pray. He hears us, and we can hear Him.

Just in the past year I have been here, there have been many saints in our midst who have been in the toughest of circumstances. Here in our congregations we have seen many of you spend significant time in the hospital, many of you have lost a loved one, and many of you have been through some sort of hardship. Many of you are going through some kind of a hardship now. Nothing in this life is easy. Not being in high school, or finding a career, or raising a family, or planning for retirement, or growing old. None of this life is easy, and in all of it we need our Savior. Beloved Congregation, if there is one thing that I pray you take away from our time together this morning, it is that your Heavenly Father listens to you and loves you, and He is speaking to you. Don't forget that this is the same guy who went to the cross... for you! Through the Holy Spirit, through other Christians, and especially through His word He does answer your cries. We just have to be willing to listen. I pray that this week you would be encouraged, knowing that He listens and speaks to you. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer