

The Voice of God

Christmas Gifts:

Isaiah 11:1-10
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Let's have some fun picking the character I'm imitating. "Get those picnic baskets, Booboo" (Yogi Bear). "And that's the way it is, Sunday, December 2nd, 2007" (Walter Cronkite). "Hey Bert, Bert, can I have a cookie?" (Ernie of Sesame Street). "I am not a crook" (Richard Nixon). "You can call me the Duke, but don't call me the John" (John Wayne). "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" (Neil Armstrong).

Alright, I had to resort to famous words and gestures because my voice was not close to the characters I was imitating. The point, however, is this. If you were familiar with these characters and individuals, you could pick out their voices. If you didn't know these characters before I spoke, then you were clueless.

How familiar are you with the voice of God? Can you recognize it? For thousands of years, people have struggled to recognize the voice of God. They have followed false prophets and false teachers. They have mistaken their own thoughts for God's and suffered greatly. How do you recognize the voice of God and what difference will it make?

Let's turn to the Christmas story. Open your Bibles to Luke, chapter two (page 782 in the Pew Bible). In verse 9 an angel speaks to a group of shepherds. In verse 13 they witness the armies of heaven, a vast host of angels, consequently they see the savior of the world. Turn back to chapter one (page 780). In verse 11, Zechariah encountered an angel in the temple. In verses

26 and 27, Mary encounters an angel in her hometown. Babies and their destinies result. I suppose an angel is an easy way to identify the voice of God, yet according to the Bible some people have not only encountered, but entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2). So let's put angels down on our list of ways to hear and recognize the voice of God.

Turn now to Matthew, chapter one (page 729). In verse 20, Joseph, who's about to break his engagement with Mary, hears the voice of God in a dream where an angel appears and speaks to him. A marriage is preserved. In Matthew 2:13 (page 730) Joseph hears the voice of God in another dream of an angel. This time he flees to Bethlehem. In verse 19 he hears God in another dream where an angel appears. In verse 22, in still another dream, Joseph is warned to take Mary and Jesus to Galilee rather than Bethlehem. I don't know why Joseph had to be asleep to hear from God, but clearly we can put dreams on our list of how to hear the voice of God.

For the Magi in Matthew 2, they heard the voice of God in circumstance. In verse 2, 9 and 10, they talk about or react to a star; in verse 3 they consult the governmental authority, King Herod. In turn in verse 4, he consults spiritual authorities, who in verse 5 consult the Scriptures. Finally, in verse 12 the wise men are warned in a dream to avoid the governmental authority. So these men hear the voice of God in circumstance, governmental authority, spiritual authority, Scripture and a dream. That expands our list.

Now let's return to Luke, chapter one (page 781). In verse 41, Mary greets Elizabeth. Pregnant with John the Baptist, Elizabeth feels the baby leap within her womb; and she is filled with God's Spirit and speaks. God's voice is witnessed in the reaction of the baby, the filling of God's Spirit (expressed in faith and joy), in verse 42 with the words of Elizabeth and in verse 46 with the words of Mary.

Our list for recognizing the voice of God now includes: angels, dreams, Scripture, circumstance, authorities, the filling of the Holy Spirit expressed in faith and joy, and the speech the Spirit inspires, prophetic speech. Although to some degree, the voice of God, expressed through this list, has always been a part of human experience, God's voice is uniquely a Christmas gift. We'll see how in Isaiah 11. Turn with me there (page 544).

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord — and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. (Isaiah 11:1-4, NIV)

Some 500 years before Jesus, this prophetic word was written. God would give humanity a leader from a line of kings that once was magnificent but now hardly discernable, a mere shoot from a stump. This new king would bring divine justice to the needy and poor of the earth. How will it get done? Read verse 4.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. (Isaiah 11:4, NIV)

How can you strike the earth with the rod of your mouth? How can you slay the wicked with the breath of your lips? We are talking words. In creation, God spoke and the world came to be. In redemption, Christ speaks and demons flee, bodies are healed and the dead are raised. When Jesus' Spirit came upon his disciples, the voice of God that was heard through Jesus was now heard through his disciples. God's voice in the disciples again made demons flee, bodies whole and dead people rise. Since it is the Creator's voice of authority, creation obeys. People didn't come to faith because believers conducted clever programs or spoke so articulately. They came to faith and experienced freedom because the voice of God affected them.

According to the prophecy, the result will be that the lamb and wolf will live together, and a little child will lead a peaceful parade of domestic animals and their predators. This great change in nature, this amazing reconciliation results from words, words spoken by Jesus, spoken through his followers. Wherever his followers go, that voice is to sound. The voice of God is to penetrate your heart and sound out through your mouth. Your children, neighbors and coworkers need to hear the voice of God through you. Their lives and futures depend on it.

I want you to hear one more thing from this particular prophecy. The prophecy begins in Isaiah 11:1 with Jesus as *a shoot from the stump of Jesse*, Jesse being the father of King David. We already noted that Jesus came from the line of King David that lost its power and prestige. Jesus was born a peasant rather than a rich prince. However, when this general part of Isaiah's prophecy ends in verse 10, it calls Jesus *the Root of Jesse*. Isn't there a difference between *a shoot from a stump* and *the root* of the original tree? Doesn't this tell us that the voice of God spoke Jesse and David into life because of Jesus and through Jesus' ministry? Jesus was *the root* that brought them life. He is the reason and cause of their being. But isn't that is also true for you? Isn't He the reason and cause of you? It is because of Jesus that God in love can make you. It is because of Jesus that God can be with you and live in you. It is because of Jesus that your voice in this world can strike the earth like Moses' rod that parted the sea. Your breath can slay the wicked and confound the evil one. The life of Jesse and his son David had their birth and fulfillment in Christ. The same is true with you.

Don't underestimate what God has done with you. You are not limited by your deficits or sins. They have already been judged on the cross. If you repent, they carry no power. What limits you is your faith. Grow it. Hear the voice of God. Heed the voice of God. Become the voice of God through your faith in Christ. That is God's will for your life.