

Hearing from God:

Are you listening? Are you obeying?

Isaiah 55

1) Good morning, everybody (whisper)

Good morning, everybody (slightly louder)

GOOD MORNING, EVERYBODY (almost a shout)

Here and now, we are at the start of a small series that should be focused on senses.

Can you please give me some examples of ways that we as humans sense? Really, I'm looking for 5 in particular:

Hearing

Seeing (sight)

Feeling (touch)

Smell

Taste

2)

Brilliant. Now thinking back to how I greeted you all this morning. What do you recon today's sense is going to be?

(wait answer) hearing)

Pardon?

(wait answer) hearing!)

Pardon?

(wait answer) hearing!)

Great! Yes. Hearing.

See, there are a number of ways that God will communicate to us throughout our lives with these wonderful senses that He has given to us, and to be honest, it has been quite hard while writing this sermon, not to cross over and steal the thunder of whoever has to follow up with feeling, seeing, and so on.

Unsurprisingly, there are so many ways in which all of our wonderful senses overlap when God is involved.

- 3) Take reading your Bible as an example. I think that it is more than fair to say that we can hear God talking to us through our Bibles. Yes?

Our book, described as the written WORD of God.

But where we can HEAR Him through the word, we can physically SEE the writings on page, We FEEL the Holy Spirit move and guide us as we read. But also, when we open up our Bibles, we read as Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 in Matthew 4:4 "It is written. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

I wouldn't recommend trying to taste your Bible physically. I can't imagine it tasting too great and I don't intend to give it a go myself. I know that some of you will get busy highlighting passages, maybe drawing pretty pictures in or denoting scripture in your Bibles. My handwriting is nowhere near neat enough to be deserving of going in a Bible, so I don't do that. I don't even like placing something on top of it; you know, when you're rushing around and collecting things together to go out for the day, you hurriedly go to put your packed lunch on top of your Bible and then realise what you're doing and in that quick panic, swap the order of how your pile is formed. So yeah, I don't want to disrespect the Bible in those ways, let alone actually bite a page out of it.

But we read in Psalm 34:8 "Taste and see that the Lord is good".

This is only the very smallest of tastes when we consider just how Great and infinite our incredible God is, but we really can get a taste of what our God is like through the reading of his beautiful, beautiful word.

So, you see how hard it is to stick to just one sense, even when it's something as seemingly simple as reading the Bible. Even that can easily cover 4 senses.

- 4) Well, today, I want to try and talk to you about hearing.

To start us off, I have a hearing-based game for us to play.

Who here has played Chinese whispers at some point in their lives?

There are a couple of you in the congregation this morning that have been given a piece of paper with a number and a message to pass on by whispering it to the person next to you.

So in a minuet on my say so, I would like the person with paper number 1 to whisper on the message to the person sat next to them and then that person to pass the message onto the person next to them, and so on, and so on.

I want you to snake the message along your row until you get to the next person who is holding a piece of paper. When you reach that person, I will give them the microphone and ask them to tell us, what they have heard.

Now we do have people in our congregation who are a little hard of hearing. Everyone is to be included here, so please make sure to raise your voice a little for them. It doesn't really matter too much if people overhear you.

So, person number 1, would you please begin to pass on your message for us?

1 Samuel 3:10

And the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel, Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening"

Okay, so as we just witnessed, listening can be a pretty hard task for us.

Even when we're fully focused on the task in hand and don't have a massive amount of distractions happening around us. We can still find it really hard to listen.

5) What we should have heard there was 1 Samuel 3:10:

Then the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel, Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for your servant is listening"

Put your hand up if you are wanting to hear from God.

Is there something in particular that you want an answer to, or do you just want the comfort of having heard directly from our Lord?

Okay. If you have your hand up right now and you are wanting an answer to a particular question or situation. Ask yourself this. Do you really want to hear from God? Or do you want God to give you the answer that you want to hear?

I want you to think about this while person number 2 starts their chain.

Person 2, please can you start your chain of Chinese whispers?

Hebrews 3:15

As has just been said: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

6) We should have heard Hebrews 3:15 then, and that reads as follows:

As has just been said: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

You might be calling out to God, but are you really listening?
Are you actually obeying?

Are you obeying what He is telling you? Or are you hardening your heart to God because you haven't been given the answer that you wanted to hear?

Let's be honest. It's a real tough one, isn't it?

And being honest, it's also something that I have fallen victim to myself.

Now, this for me is quite a hard truth to tell. But as we read the words of Jesus Himself in Luke 12:2-3:

There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

This comes when Jesus is addressing his disciples and tells them to be on their "Guard against the yeast of the pharisees." That yeast Jesus warns of is hypocrisy and I do not intend to stand before you all as a hypocrite.

For a long time, I struggled with Lust.

When I came to faith, God took away so many of my bad habits and stopped me from smoking the things I was smoking. Nearly everything went away easily and in the blink of an eye. I was truly born again, a new creation, but lust continued to be a struggle for me.

I hated it. I wanted it to stop. I wanted it to go. After each time of slipping up and indulging I hated myself and felt shameful for days.

At first, I made the major mistake of just trying to get it to go away on my own.

Who else here has been foolish and tried to tackle something themselves instead of taking it to God? How did it go? (wait answer if anyone is willing)

So, I took it to God in prayer. I begged; I pleaded and even wept for it to be taken from me. I didn't even want to share the yolk of the burden. I just wanted it gone entirely.

I heard from God!

I was given an answer! ...

"It will only stop, if you tell Sian."

Gut wrenching!

So, did I listen to God and tell Sian?

No! I was an idiot.

I knew that God had given me an answer, but I didn't want that answer. I just wanted this problem gone and I didn't want Sian to see my weaknesses, so I guess I hardened my heart a little, and didn't do what I was told.

Now I went to 1 or 2 other Christian men in my life who I trust and who are strong in their faith, and I told them what I was struggling with and asked them to pray for me.

But things didn't get better.

Again, I went to God in prayer, and what answer do you think I got?

(wait for response) that's right. The, exact, same, one...

“It will only stop, if you tell Sian.”

I had already tried managing it on my own, asking for it to be taken from me, asking others to pray about it. So, did I relent? Did I soften my heart and listen to God?

No!

Telling Sian was the last thing that I ever wanted to do. Every time I fell, I was already internally embarrassed and ashamed. I couldn't bear the thought of her knowing that I had been letting her down.

Every time I fell, I betrayed her and not only did I betray her, I betrayed Jesus too. I didn't know what the repercussions would be, and I didn't want to know. I knew that at the very least, she would be upset, and I didn't want to upset her.

So, what did I do?

I went back to the worst thing possible. Trying to manage it myself.

And so, it got worse and worse and worse. Every time I would fall, the day after, Sian would inexplicably be in a foul mood with me, and I could physically see this thing working its way in as a wedge between the two of us and driving us apart.

I had verses such as the writings of Paul as he wrote in Romans 7:15:

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do.”

And the words of Jesus from Matthew 18:9 swirling in my head:

“And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.”

The thoughts of, do I pray of God to remove my ability to see. Surely it would be better that I never see again than continue on indulging in sin.

So, with my heart torn with unnecessary and self-induced toil, I prayed again and got the same answer.

“It will only stop, if you tell Sian.”

And so, I eventually softened my heart. I not only listened to God, but I obeyed Him.

I did one of the hardest things that I've ever done in my life. I told Sian.

And you know what? It didn't stop the urge (not immediately anyway) but I stopped falling and failing as soon as I listened to God, as soon as I obeyed Him and we shared that yolk.

Now, I've been honest with you.

can you be honest with yourself?

Do you recognise a time in your life that you heard an answer, but you chose to ignore it because it wasn't what you wanted to hear?

Would person number 3 please start to whisper your message?

Proverbs 1:33

“But whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

7) We should have gotten Proverbs 1:33 just then. That reads:

“But whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

Proverbs 1:33 rings absolute truth from my personal experience. As soon as I actually listened to God and chose to obey Him, the ease of my life became far more abundant.

It is important that we recognise; None of this, none of our faith is about doing things to get what WE want.

WE aren't here to try and bend Gods will to align with our own.

When we recite the Lord's prayer, we don't say:

Our Father in Heaven, glory to our names. Lord, let my kingdom come and be made triumphant where I go and how I like, let my will be done, regardless of the cost and how much sin it leads me to.

It is YOUR Kingdom come, Lord. Your will (not ours. HIS will.) be done. Here on Earth in the same way as it is in heaven.

We must seek for our will to align with God's, not for Him to align with us.

Person number 4. Please will you start your whisper chain?

Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

8) We should have just heard Romans 8:28 then:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to... (who's purpose?) HIS purpose.

God wants the best for us, and so when we align to His will, even if it is something we are scared to do, don't necessarily want to do or can't see what good will come from it. Is there any surprise when things all work out well, when He works for the good of those who love Him.

But how will that work. If that is true, then why can't I see the finish line? Why can't I see the purpose of what He is asking from me?

Person 5. Please can you start your whispers?

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.

- 9) What we should have heard there was Proverbs 3:5-6:
Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.

So why can't I see the finish line? Why can't I see the purpose of what He is asking from me?

Really, the answer to that is, "it doesn't matter". Trust in the Lord and let him pave out those straight paths.

If I were to illustrate it for you though, I would ask for you to think of it like this.
You're walking along this perfectly straight road.

- 10) This one in particular is the Eyre highway in Australia. It goes on for miles and miles and miles,

- 11) 90 miles to be exact.

- 12) Now, because of the curvature of the earth, the road drops away over the horizon and so you can't see the end. You know that it is perfectly straight and that it has an end because I've told you so and I've just shown you on a map. But when you're there and in the middle of it, you can't see all this and so you'll just have to trust me.

However,

- 13) if you get into satellite mode and...
14) zoom out,
15) and out,
16) and out again. You can see the start, you can see where you're at and you can see the very end to where the builders have stretched this impressive straight road.

- 17) Your life is the exact same. We have a straight path that is laid out ahead of us, and how do we know. Because we're told so. Just like I have told you about the Eyre Highway and you had to trust me, you have to trust in God, just as we heard in Proverbs 3:5-6. When we completely trust in the LORD with every bit of our being and submit all of our ways to Him, He will make our paths straight.

Not only did I tell you about the Eyre highway, I also showed you a map. And if you're a visual learner like me, I've drawn a map, just for you.

- 18) Here at the start, we see where we've come from in Psalm 139 as God creates our inmost being and knits us together in our mother's womb.

9 months later after giving our mothers some real backpain and kicking her to bits, we're then born.

We get nurtured and we grow up, and right over here we have our destination.

Unlike the Eyre highway where the destination is a dirty old truck stop in the middle of the outback, our destination is the most beautiful and grand destination that is beyond comprehension. Being with our Lovely, Wonderful Jesus.

The thing is, there is no satellite mode that you're able to view for this map. The only one that can see that is God Himself.

God can see all of that road. He can see where you started, where you're currently at and also see your finish line all at the same time. But He's the only one that can see all that and you've just got to trust in Him.

None of this is to say that it is easy, quite often it can seem like you're going absolutely nowhere, especially when you're right in the middle of the path.

19) It is like this beach in Norfolk that my family took us too once. If you've ever walked Cley Beach to Blakeney point, then you'll know exactly what I mean when I say this, but it is absolutely horrendous and there is nowhere in this world that I have already been that I would avoid revisiting quite as much as this place.

20) The sand is all really awfully deep shingle and for every step that you take, your foot sinks in by a foot and so each step feels like you're taking 5. This walk is also 4.5 miles to get to Blakeney point and to make things worse, after barley catching a far of glimpse of these seals that it turns out only my sister and my uncle were bothered about seeing to begin with,

21) we then had to walk the 4.5 miles back to the car again but this time doing so while the tide is coming in, and so with the straight beach being so long, once you've walked half way along, you can't see these stupid seals that you were supposed to be seeing at Blakeney point where you started and there is no way of seeing the carpark where you're finishing until you're basically right at it. All you can see is more and more of this awful shingle, the sea to the left and the sky to the right. So with each gruelling step that you take, it feels like you're going absolutely nowhere.

In reality though, you are making your way down this straight path, and you are getting closer even when it doesn't feel like you're going anywhere.

22) So long as you fully trust in the Lord, He will make your path straight and just like that carpark, most the time, you likely won't see the finish line until you're already at it, but that is okay, so long as you trust in God.

If you stop trusting in God though, and instead of walking along the straight path, you begin to lean on your own understanding, chose to leave the path and wonder off into the wilderness, don't be baffled when things start to go wrong again.

If you start wondering off into the wilderness at Cley beach, you're either heading into cold and gloomy North Sea or worse, your heading into marshes, bogs and quicksand to the other side. Either way, you'll soon be up to your neck in it and if you stray too far, you're gonna end up drowning.

23) So, are you listening, and more importantly are you obeying?

But how will you hear from God? How is He calling to you?

There might be some here in our congregation who have been incredibly blessed and gotten to hear His voice audibly. I know someone here who has had this experience and said, "it was just as though it was someone sat next to me and they had turned and whispered in my ear."

A Whisper, just as many of you have done with the various passages today.

So, you may hear Him audibly. But not many do, and at time of writing, I haven't.

So how and where will you hear from God?

Well first and foremost, we hear Him through scripture.

The books in the Bible aren't simply historical accounts left to the ages to check up on what HAS happened.

24) As it is written in in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for EVERY good work.

But not only is all scripture "God-breathed". We're told in Hebrews 4:12 that:

25) the word of God is alive and active! And it is sharper than a double-edged sword.

So, some of you might be sat around hoping to hear from God, but then you don't even pick up His word that is right in front of you and available to you at all times of day.

Sian bought me this lovely mug, and I have a coaster to go with it. It's small so I'll read it to you, but it's titled "BIBLE. EMERGENCY NUMBERS"

And so, we've got stuff like:

When in sorrow, call John 14

When men fail you, call psalm 27

When you have sinned, call psalm 51

When you want Christian assurance, call Romans 8:1-31

And so on

And so on

If you're wanting an answer, it is probably in the Bible. In Gods breathed word.

The closer you get to Him, and more time you spend with Him. The easier it is to hear God

I need a volunteer. X I want you to stand at the end of the isle and I'll tell you a phrase. Each time I say it, I want you to take 2 steps forward until you're able to repeat what I've told you.

"The further you stay from God, the harder it is to hear"

The further you stay from God, the harder it is to hear His voice. So, in the same sense that the more you pick up your Bible, the easier it is to hear from God. The less you pick up your Bible, the harder it is to hear... And the same can be said for Sin.

Can I have another volunteer please.

These headphones represent sin in your life. I want you to repeat the phrase that I tell you...

"Jesus loves me"

Now we'll pretend you've been sinning.

You've gone over to your friends house and your friend's mum has baked some cookies and left them on the side to cool. You know it is wrong but you decided to take one anyway. You sinned by stealing...

Please put on the headphones and now try and repeat what I say.

"Return to me with all your heart" -Joel

Okay, Right. We'll take it a step further.

Your friends parent realises that there's a cookie missing and asks you about it. You don't want to get into trouble, so you say that you don't know and say that it was your friend's little brother. He must have taken them.

You lied and gave false testimony against your neighbour.

Now put the headphones back on and I'll play music while I talk, then I want you to repeat to me what I said.

"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." - Matthew (word of Jesus)

And so now, it's getting a little harder to hear, isn't it?

But lets take it further, still.

You're now home after not getting caught lying or stealing. You have your usual pocket money from your parents but it's not quite enough for the things you want from the shop. You notice that your mum has left a £5 note on the coffee table and think that because you got away with the little cookie you took earlier, you might as well take the £5. By doing this though, not only have you stolen, you've also dishonoured your mother and father.

Now were going to put the headphones back on and turn them right up and then I want you to repeat back to me.

"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." – Hebrews

You see, Satan knows your name and calls you by your sin. But Jesus knows your sin and still calls you by your name.

One thing you may have noticed about all those sentences that I just had X repeat back to me was that God never stops calling out to you. He never stops loving you. But the further you live your life from Him, the more that Satan is going to attempt to drown out His voice by calling you by your sin and ultimately make it harder for you to hear from God.

Okay. So, I hope that we're all wanting to hear from God. We now all not only want to hear Him but also want to obey Him too and follow His straight path.

We now know one way to connect and how to keep His voice clear; but how else might we hear from God.

Well:

26) You might hear God through the preacher on a Sunday. You might have sat and listened to a sermon that you connected to so deeply that it left you in floods of tears and you know that God was speaking to you directly through the person leading that talk.

27) You might hear Him through dreams in the night if He were to give you visions.

28) One of my favourite ways that He talks to me is while I write sermons. I'll be typing away on my laptop, considering what message to bring to everyone and then my heart gets prompted in a way that I would never think of myself and God really does lead all my writings and for that I truly am thankful.

29) You may hear from Him through the children making noise around you. Sometimes it is just a racket, but equally, God can use them to convey very important messages. Don't forget that Acts 2:17 tells us that our sons and daughters will prophesy.

30) When heard from God with the answer, “It will only stop if you tell Sain.” That was just instilled on my heart, it was a bit like a media download on your phone. I clicked an icon (prayed to God) and all of a sudden, the answer was there.

That was the Holy spirit that came to me with the answer to my prayer. I just knew that this particular answer was from God. It was rooted in scripture and not something I would desire to do myself.

31) But what if I’m unsure if it’s God or my own thoughts?

Well, I have a little video for you quickly before we close in prayer...

VIDEO

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rwlhjpUEOI>

PRAYER