

## Hearing the Voice of God

Sunday, May 14, 2023 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

1 Samuel 1:8-18; Luke 1:35-38 The Sixth Sunday of Easter

### Introduction

I started putting together this sermon with the idea that I would feature two women in the Bible who heard the voice of God, and hopefully draw some inspiration from them that we can relate to our own life experience. What I found is that attitude is vital when it comes to being led by the Holy Spirit. So instead of considering the question of whether a person can actually hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, I would like to share a few thoughts on attitude, and I would like to share a few jokes, just for fun, that I've gleaned from Pinterest. The jokes are about bad attitudes because they are more fun.

Here are a few I thought might be acceptable for a sermon: "Thursday. The most useless day. It only exists as a reminder that it's been a really long week, and it's still not over." Or this one; "I exercised once, but found I was allergic to it. My skin flushed and my heart raced. I got sweaty and short of breath. Very dangerous." There are plenty of bad attitudes in the Bible as well, but I'd like to share a couple of examples in which attitude set the stage for the Holy Spirit to do something great, and places a person, on some level, to hear from and to be used by God.

### Set the stage

Hannah and Mary. Both said the same thing that was crucial.

In our first passage of Scripture, we find the plight of Hannah, a young wife who wants to have children more than anything. She and her husband are making an annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, the ancient site of the Tabernacle. The high priest of the setting is Eli, assisted by his two corrupt sons. When Eli sees Hannah praying, he assumes erroneously that she is drunk, but blesses her when corrected. Hannah never hears any message from God, though her son, Samuel, will do so. She hears a "yes" from God when her son is born. It took some time, but it happened to the young woman who referred to herself as the "maidservant" seeking the favor of God.

In Luke's Gospel, centuries later, a young lady in very different circumstances demonstrates the same reverent and healthy attitude. The Angel Gabriel visits Mary, who is engaged to Joseph, to tell her that she will give birth to a son, and to name Him Jesus, and that He will be the Messiah. The circumstances are difficult. She and Joseph are engaged but not yet married in a culture that requires a divorce for an engagement to be broken. Joseph would be suspicious (and he was). People might talk (and they probably did). But Mary, despite her concern and confusion, makes this classic statement of attitude in verse 38 when she said, "Behold, the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. We have no record that she ever saw him again in her lifetime on earth. But she was positioned to receive blessing unlike anything anyone else has ever enjoyed throughout the history of humanity.

**Main Point and Application:** Hearing the voice of God is more of attitude than of experience. The point is that attitude is essential to hearing, in whatever fashion, the voice of the Holy Spirit. He speaks in numerous ways. First of all, most of what the Holy Spirit will ever need to say to you is already found in Scripture, so a good working knowledge of the Scriptures makes all the difference in the world. Also, times of quiet listening and reflection allows the Holy Spirit

opportunity to speak to your conscience. Biblically, the Spirit does work through dreams and intuition, but we can easily mistake such things as being more than our imagination when it is not. But, looking at these two passages, particularly Mary's response to Gabriel in Luke, attitude provides the Holy Spirit crucial access to you. You may hear nothing, but your character changes, your understanding of Scripture grows, your prayer life deepens and your whole worldview develops. "Behold, the servant of the Lord," is the attitude that makes all the difference.

One of the best descriptions of this attitude is in Philippians 2:5-8

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: (6) Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: (7) But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: (8) And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Sgt. Phillips

Here's a description of the value of a servant's heart from an article written by Sgt. Ashley Phillips of the US Marine Corps. "In a job interview recently, the hiring manager corrected me after I talked about my leadership experience. He said, "It sounds more to me like you're a servant leader." What's the difference?"

Answer: It's been said often that someone with a military background is a natural leader. You've been taught to take risks, assume accountability, face adversity and uncertainty, and care for those around you. Leadership is that act of leading and influencing others in a team, organization, or initiative.

Servant leadership takes leadership one step further. A servant leader -- someone who leads with a servant heart -- describes a philosophy that is selfless, focused on others and not about power, fame or credit. A servant leader truly is more concerned and passionate about bettering the environment or those they lead than taking control." Sgt. Ashley Phillips US Marines\*\*

Note how he describes leading with a servant's heart as taking leadership to the next level.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when it comes to the question of hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit, "how" or "is it possible" may be less important than "do I have the right attitude?" "Behold, the servant of the Lord, may it be to me according to your word" is the right way to look at ourselves, at life, at God. Bad attitudes may be funny, but this attitude is what makes you accessible to the Holy Spirit

\* <https://www.pinterest.com/snookpup/bad-attitude-humor/>

\*\* <https://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/5-qualities-of-servant-leadership-and-leading-servant-heart.html>