

# Listen

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Date: 01 August 2021

Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

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- [ 15 : 08 ]    Thank you. Thank you. What I cannot see Oh, I don't want to miss one word you say to  
                  me Cause everything you say in life to me I don't want to miss one word you see So quiet  
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In your name we pray, amen So today we'd like to share With our pastoral prayer That Grace Is doing much better She had surgery and is recovering And they're hoping that she gets to go home This week So that is definitely something to celebrate And we have a member, Ed, in our congregation Who has had another stroke and another setback So we want to make sure that we keep him Especially in our prayers this week Please pray with me Oh God, as we're in this space This moment as your humble servants We recognize that all our siblings Brothers, sisters, and family Right now our whole world is connected By an ongoing pandemic But your connective thread is more powerful still

From state to state And continent to continent Culture to culture We spread our compassion And connection with all There's so much happening In the lives and lungs and hearts And aches of those we love And too often We don't even know how to help Help us to reach out For help When we realize that we are the ones That have a need And help us to reach towards another When asked You move within us in such simple ways A note A smile A phone call Place within our thinking And feeling The name or face Of one who needs us this week Help us to know how to respond Be the loving bond between us all So that all may be well God Sometimes we think we already know it all Keep us on our toes

To dissipate assumptions To encourage us to ask questions To come together With that curiosity And wonder Help us Make new systems And new works of art That will take our breath away For that moment Teach us what we need to know So that we can be stunned By the potential That can be realized Mark us for you With love in all we do In the name of Jesus Let us be as caring As we serve Amen Amen K

[ 20 : 58 ] Good morning.

Our scripture reading this morning is from the book of Acts, chapter 16, verses 6 through 15. Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.

When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

During the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him. Come over to Macedonia and help us. After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

From Troas, we put out to sea and sailed straight for Semothrace. And the next day, we went on to Neapolis. From there, we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia.

[ 22 : 21 ] And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.

One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. If you consider me a believer in the Lord, she said, come and stay at my house.

And she persuaded us. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So let's pray together.

Loving and gracious God, we give you thanks for this moment. As we come to this time, having sung your praises and opened our hearts in prayer and heard your word.

[ 23 : 45 ] Lord, we are open and ready. Lord, we pray that you would move in us, plant a seed that will grow, bear fruit for the honor and glory of your name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. Amen. So, as you heard me say during our greeting today, that we are in this series called Drawn In, which continues to discuss this ongoing creative project that God is doing in the world.

You know, we hear the creation story, but we forget that God is constantly in creative mode. And this great story continues to unfold around us. And today we want to talk about the idea of listening as a part of that ongoing creative work.

Because we know that God uses each of us, and part of that is listening to God. Now, as we start to think about listening, I want you to consider a small question for me, which is how good are you at following directions?

Now, I'm lucky because my wife's not here today. Because there would be a whole lot of commentary about how good I follow directions.

[ 25 : 02 ] Now, there's others in this room who also know how well I follow directions. So, I'm going to just leave that where it is. But that said, I want all of us to consider how well we follow directions.

Now, when you think about following directions, that has context. Because when most people think about following directions, there's the easy ones, like your GPS. It's amazing how willing we are to just turn our lives over to this little box in our car.

And we have no idea where we are, and we're just going to trust it to get us where we go. Right? I had a real problem with this when GPS's first became kind of normal. And I had a couple bad experiences.

But now, just kind of pop it on in and do my thing. And it's not always fun, I'm sure. Because along the way, you start to think, well, Siri, I know you're saying do this.

But then your eyes and your brain tell you that this way makes more sense. So, the question is, will you follow directions? Then there's the joy of three little words that I'm willing to bet everybody has also encountered.

[ 26 : 15 ] Called, some assembly required. And then you get the box. You open the box, and you take out that multiple folded little piece of paper. And you've got to decipher the pictures and make out that little itty-bitty print.

And then you look at all the parts, and you look at the paper. And pretty soon, part A doesn't seem to work in part B the way it's drawn on the piece of paper.

And you start to think, well, I'm just going to do this on my own. Again, how well we are following directions. Now, if you still got a little assortment of pieces over here, that tells you what you need to know, right?

But most of the time, that tends to work out. Sometimes it doesn't. Now, you guys also know that cooking is a little hobby of mine. And another way of following directions is how closely you can follow a recipe.

Because everybody who's been in the kitchen knows that you start to follow those steps. And then the minute you taste it, you go, no, that ain't right. And you start playing with it. And again, we come down to this idea of how well we're going to follow directions.

[ 27 : 27 ] And I see that I've got some folks who are kind of in my camp who want to improvise and think we can work better than the paper. But that's kind of how we get through life, right?

That's what we do. And the reason why this is an important thing for us to think about is because when we consider this idea of how well we listen, because listening is more than simply processing language.

We probably have all experienced that in our relationships. Because we know that listening is not just hearing. Now, however you want to play that semantic game, I'm going to leave it to you.

But listening is not just hearing. And as a kid, I remember my mother would distinctly say, you need to listen to me. Now, when you've heard that sentence, I'm willing to bet whoever has said it and everybody who has heard it understands that we are not just simply processing language.

In other words, when that language hits you, it needs to come out in how you actually behave. That's what she was trying to communicate. Don't just hear what I said.

[ 28 : 44 ] Do what I said. And that is really our challenge today, right? Because it's one thing to say we listen.

But if we look at how we behave and if what we have done is not consistent with what we have heard, then have we truly listened? Have we truly listened?

How well did we follow direction? Okay. That's the ongoing struggle we have, especially in our walk with God.

Because it's one thing to say, sure, I listen. But when you take a step back and consider your ongoing conversation with God, I know that there are those who struggle to say, well, God doesn't really seem to talk to me at all.

We're going to spend a little time with that. But the other piece is when you have received that communication, do you truly listen?

[ 29 : 51 ] Because if we're going to play our part in God's ongoing creative work in the world, then we have to be willing to do the part that God has given us.

And that's where the listening becomes so critical. And in our scripture passage today, we find a really powerful example of someone who is listening faithfully.

Paul gives us a really powerful piece of faithful listening in what we read today. So as we visit the story, we start off with this really strange geography lesson.

So let's not get overly amazed by all the names and the places. Suffice it to say this. There's that frog again.

Sorry. Suffice it to say this. Paul sets out on his second missionary journey. He heads north from Jerusalem. And when he starts heading north, he goes through Syria.

[ 30 : 54 ] He kind of hooks a left into the peninsula. Okay. He goes into the peninsula and there's a lot of Roman and other districts in there. When he does that, he thinks he's going to keep going north.

But when he gets to one district to the north, the spirit prevents him from going. Now, Paul had a plan.

He said, we are going here. He and the team start walking and off they go. And they are planting. They are evangelizing.

They are preaching. And then they get to this one place where they think they're headed and Jesus says no. Okay. Now, I'm wondering how many of us have had a moment like that where you thought you were headed somewhere.

You thought your life was headed in a particular direction or you were going to do something a particular way. And then all of a sudden something starts bubbling up in you that says no. This is not it.

[ 31 : 58 ] Okay. However, that happens to you. Whether it comes to you as something you discern audibly. Whether it comes to you as something you discern other ways in your spirit.

Whether physically the circumstances start to shift and change and you realize this is not going to happen the way I thought it was going to happen. Clearly, God is saying turn around.

The question is, will you listen to that? Because I have seen some folks get caught up in their own dogged determination and press forward despite all of that communication.

And that's where that listening thing becomes pretty key. Because that's one of our biggest challenges as disciples. One of our biggest challenges comes down to, are we doing what God wants us to do?

And are we willing to be led by God? Or are we simply hoping God's going to do what we want to do? Is he just simply going to bless our agenda?

[ 33 : 17 ] Or are we going to be the disciples? Getting caught up in that is a real issue. And when you consider the ways in which we pray sometimes.

When you consider the ways in which we serve sometimes. When you consider the ways in which we move through life. The challenge for us becomes, when do you actually make space in your walk with God to listen to God?

That's a real question every disciple needs to ponder for a while. Because one of the things that's easy for us to do is because God has taught us to do this.

God has said it is okay. Which is to bring our desires. And we have done that. We're really good at that part. Right?

God, here's what I want. But, if that's the sum total of your conversation with God. God, here's what I want.

[ 34 : 23 ] When do you actually make space on purpose to invite God to tell you something?

When do you actually do that? Because if you never do that, then why are you surprised you say, well, God doesn't talk to me?

It couldn't be that it's not so much that God isn't talking to you. You've just never made any space or took a minute to try to actually listen.

We've all had one-sided communications before, right? We know what that's like. And you've probably had a relationship at some point in your life where the sum total of it was, here's your marching orders.

Here's what's going to happen. All right? Do this for me. Most of us don't find those relationships very fun. But, again, I ask you to consider, if that's the nature of your conversation with God, here's what I want today.

[ 35 : 42 ] When do you purposefully listen?

And so Paul, he gets up there and he encounters whatever God does that tells him, this is not where you're supposed to be. So he turns around and he goes to this city called Troas, it's a port city.

And so they're sitting there pondering their next move. And he has this vision of a person from Macedonia saying, come over here and help us. Now Macedonia is across this body of water.

And so that's what we're going to do. And what you heard Jan read today is they set out for another port city, which is halfway across, called Samothrace. And then they head over to Neapolis, then they get all the way to Philippi, which is in Macedonia.

Okay? So that's how the journey unfolds. He gets there. And so now what? Okay? He does what you would expect him to do. He looks for the group that's actually believers.

[ 36 : 50 ] He says, we're looking for a place of prayer. Now, it's not clear whether there was an actual synagogue. Most likely there was not, or else the writer probably would have said that.

Luke would have said, we went to the synagogue. So they went to a place of prayer, which means there was a group of believers. And they would gather regularly at this place where they would talk about God and pray together.

Now, the reason that there's probably not a synagogue is that in order to establish a synagogue, you had to have 10 married men to establish a synagogue, which is why the context becomes that more important, because it says we engage some of the women there.

Right? So that kind of sets up where he's at. So they show up. They start talking. And they meet Lydia. Now, Lydia is a place, but it's also probably associated with this woman, kind of like Mary Magdalene, right?

Because Magdala is a place that got associated with this woman, right? Mary from Magdala, Mary Magdalene. And so we got the same sort of deal going on here. Anyway, what her name is is not really issued.

[ 38 : 04 ] The key is that because she listens to Paul and Paul listens to the Spirit and talks to her, what we have is a new household that becomes followers of Jesus.

Lydia carries some weight. Okay? She runs a business. Right? And she's got a whole household that follows her. And so she's a leader in this community.

She hears. She listens. She responds. The same way Paul listened and responded. And all of a sudden, we've got a new story happening in the city of Philippi.

That's a powerful thing. Now, the question we want to ask ourselves is, had Paul decided to press through and go all the way into Bithynia, does that story happen?

Does that story happen? Now, some good things may have happened, right? He may have gone up there and converted some people. You know, some folks would have heard the word.

[ 39 : 09 ] But what actually started to flow down here was the plan. And he had to be open to that. Will we, as people of God, decide what we think is right is more important than what the Spirit is telling us in our souls?

Because if we feed some hungry people, I don't think God is upset about that. If a thirsty person gets something to drink or a naked person gets clothing, that's not a bad thing.

But if God is saying, I had a plan for you over here where I was going to bless 5,000 and you fed 15,000. That there was something in store over here that was going to be great.

And what you did was wonderful. But that wasn't the plan. That's the challenge we got to deal with. That's the challenge we got to deal with.

Because we want to be in our best relationship with God, living our best life, if you will. We can do some good things, but are we really living our best life?

[ 40 : 19 ] And to live our best life in God, that means we got to let God be God and not us. We have to do the listening part. And if we're not going to do the listening part, we have to consider what that implies for the rest of it.

Because as you heard me say last week, God is at work creating this wonderful masterpiece, this huge masterwork, however you envision it. Whether it's this huge tapestry with all of its threads, or whether it's this amazing symphony with all of its instruments and notes, whether it's this incredible painting with all of its strokes and colors.

But all the individual pieces come together to make the masterwork. And you, as an individual piece, need to play the part you have been given to play for that to happen.

It's not that God can't fix it if you don't do it. But that's not the grand design. That's not the grand design.

So are you willing to be led? Are you willing to listen to God? See, here's the thing that makes this even more complex.

[ 41 : 36 ] We get caught up in trying to drive the bus. We refuse to take the direction. And some good things happen along the way, and we get excited. But we forget that God has the master plan.

The problem for us is that what we really want from God, the things that we already have, the things that we already have access to, come from obedient, loving listening.

That when you are sure that you are walking in God's will, when you are sure that you are doing your part in God's plan, when you have hit that stride that God had intended for you, that's when your joy is unleashed in the way it's supposed to be unleashed.

That's when the peace of mind and heart and soul that you seek becomes most obvious to you, because you know you are resting in God the way you are intended to rest in God.

So the things that we really want come from that obedient listening, as opposed to simply continuing to ask all the time, which is what most people do.

[ 42 : 49 ] We get ourselves caught up in asking for the stuff and asking for the things when it's not the things that we're really seeking. What we want is the closeness of the relationship.

And the closeness of the relationship means that when God is speaking, you are responding. And that's when we are at our best as disciples.

That's when we're living our best life, if you will. Now, that doesn't look like what we think most of the time. Most people I know who are walking closely with Christ are not really walking the path they thought they were going to walk.

That their life looks very different than their childhood dreams. That yesterday looks very different than today, which will probably look very different than tomorrow.

That's because God is God. And God is up to things that we don't see coming, but that are amazing. If you have been on that path, and you know what I'm talking about, where you were on one path, your journey was taking you one way, then God said, no, I want you to go over here.

[ 44 : 02 ] And if you listened to that, and you came over here, and you saw all that joy, all that blessing, all that love, all that incredible work that God has done in your life, you know what I'm talking about.

But you had to listen. And if you are confused, if you are not sure, if you're saying, God, I would like to get that.

Help me get to that place. Let me experience that. Then your challenge is to do what we said earlier. Actually, make intentional space to listen.

Make intentional space to listen. In your ongoing conversation with God, it's right to ask for your desires, but maybe you ought to change what you desire.

In other words, yeah, sure, ask for what you need. But also ask, Lord, can you make it clear for me where I'm supposed to be?

[ 45 : 10 ] Lord, if this is what you want from me, close the distractions, close those other doors and make sure this is the only path I see. If this is what you want from me, Lord, speak more clearly about that and not let this other noise keep drowning out the voice I'm trying to hear.

Change what you desire. Change what you're asking for so that when God is responding, that you will hear the things that make a difference.

Because if that's what we are seeking from God, that's when we step into that blessing. That's when we hit those notes that become part of that grand symphony.

But we have to listen. The hard part is letting go of what we think ought to happen and simply letting God be God.

Let go of what we think ought to happen and simply let God be God. But church, if you are not sure, if you are unclear, I know I got witnesses in this room.

[ 46 : 29 ] I know I got folks who can tell their stories of how God has done exactly that. And if you need to get in a circle, if you need to get in a conversation, if you want some more of that clarified for you, look to your siblings that are around you.

Because there are people more than happy to tell you their story. If you're not sure, read more of the story you already have of how it looked one way and God did another thing and took his people to a different place.

That is who our God is. That is who our God is. So let's trust him enough to truly listen.

Amen. And amen. Almighty and gracious God, thank you for the ways in which you continue to work. Even if your work goes so far beyond what we see or expect.

Lord God, we know that your plan is better and bigger than our own. Help us to humble ourselves, humble our hearts, so that we can play the part you have created for us to play.

[ 47 : 41 ] We know that you have carved out a space that is uniquely and distinctly ours. Help us be willing. Help us love you enough and be humble enough to step into the path you have created for us.

Yes, Lord, we hear the noise of the world. Yes, Lord, our hearts chase after things of the world. Yes, Lord, our eyes see things we think should be what we want.

But we know that your desire for us is better. Your plan for us is right and perfect. So, Lord, speak.

Speak to your people. Let us hear your voice above all of the noise and distraction. And humble our hearts, Spirit. Humble our hearts, so that we can truly listen to our God.

Amen. My husband and I traveled to Virginia, to a particular place in the early GPS world.

[ 49 : 04 ] And suddenly we were in green fields. There was nothing on the GPS but green. No roads. No signs.

Nothing. Just green. I think and I believe that sometimes the reason that Jesus gave us this gift of Holy Communion is that there are times and places when we need to reorient, reconnect, reconnect, as Scott said, and stopping and pausing and receiving this gift, which feeds us, encourages us, and invites us to be fed for the journey even when we sometimes can't see in front of us.

And so the Lord be with you. Lift up your hearts. Lift up your hearts. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Give thanks to the Lord our God. God set in motion the grandest creativity project of all. Light where there was no light, waters and land, creatures on foot and wing, beauty and laughter, and God called it good.

Out of goodness we came, each blessed, blessed with the gifts of the Creator. We were invited to begin our lives of creating, making, building, planting, crafting, fashioning, engineering.

[ 50 : 39 ] Sometimes we get sidetracked and we forget this true calling and sometimes we have destroyed instead of built up. But you, God, keep repairing our lives, calling us again into the joy of relationship with you.

So we proclaim to you our praise with the saints of all time and place, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest. Your creativity knows no bounds and in the fullness of time you came to us, fashioned in our own flesh and blood.



In sending Jesus, you created human and holy connection and you showed us what love is, what it looks like in public, preaching good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovering sight to the blind, and setting at liberty those who are oppressed.

Jesus promised to continue this work through a new covenant of creativity, sending his spirit to remain in and move through us.

[ 52 : 00 ] On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, he gave thanks to you and broke the bread and gave it to his disciples and said, Take and eat.

This is my body, which is broken for you. When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples and said, Drink from this, all of you.

This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

And so what shall we do if you repeat after me? We will break ourselves open. We will pour ourselves out in food for the hungry and love for the stranger.

Just as Christ offered all, so too shall we. We will rise to new life and commit to create.

[ 53 : 15 ] And we proclaim the mystery of faith. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us in this moment so that we might know your presence and power in our lives.

O Lord, make us one so that we can be used to create your reign on earth as it is in heaven. Let this bread and fruit of the vine fill us with your spirit for the work and play of loving creation in each other fully.

And now, with the confidence of the children of God, let us pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not to temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. As we are in this season of sharing in communion, a reminder for one and all that this table is the Lord's table and every single person who desires to come is welcome to receive a piece of bread and dip it into the cup.

[ 54 : 44 ] The gluten-free station will be here where throughout all the communion you have the choice to receive a piece of bread and dip it in the cup or to be given one of the cups gluten-free over here and with gluten over here that are prepackaged because I know some people want that comfort and reassurance still.

Just know that all are welcome. Thank you. Thank you.

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