

Text: Luke 9:35

Theme: Mastering the Art of Listening

February 7, 2016

Maybe it only happened to me or maybe not, but, as a kid, I remember my mother saying to me at particular moments when I was doing something wrong, "Listen to me. Listen when I'm talking to you!" It's not easy to listen, especially when when aren't interested in what's being said. Yet, listening is crucial in life and even more so in the faith-realm. As Jesus is miraculously transfigured before Peter, James, and John, God, the Father, speaks only three words of instruction as He says, "Listen to Him!"

I. Although thousands of years have passed, God still calls us to master the art of listening. A. But, like so many before us, we struggle to master the art. 1. We struggle at times because we think God has nothing useful to say. We face daily pain; we pray for relief, but relief seems non-existent. A family member faces a serious illness. We ask God to provide healing and we hear silence. We encounter another aspect of our broken world and we wish God would fix it, but it remains broken. In those types of situations, we find ourselves struggling to listen. In our minds, God has nothing useful to say because He isn't saying what we want to hear.

2. We struggle because we are easily distracted. Excuse my digression, but I just noticed that there's a bat flying around in the balcony. Do you see how easily it happens? There's no bat in the balcony, but just the mention of it, distracts us. Whether in this place or outside this place, distractions steal our focus. Look at Peter in our text. "Let us make three tents." A bit distracted, wouldn't you agree? Day after day, we struggle to focus, to keep our minds on building our faith and following our Lord because around us there's a multitude of distractions, things that seem important, things that prevent us from listening to Him.

3. We struggle because of selective hearing. As a kid, I was a master at selective hearing. I heard what I wanted to hear when I wanted to hear it. Can you relate? If we didn't know better, we would have to say that we were born with it. Mom says and we hear nothing. Dad says and we act like no one said a word. Then Mom or Dad raise their voice and suddenly we decide it's time to listen. The same scenario occurs in our relationship with our heavenly Father. He speaks, but we choose not to listen. He speaks again and sometimes we still refuse to listen. Oftentimes, selective hearing leads us to think God isn't speaking when He's been talking all along.

B. We know of our struggles. How, then, do we master the art of listening? 1. We start by believing. Why were Moses and Abraham and the Prophets such great men of faith? For starters, they believed when God spoke. When God told Noah there was going to be a flood, did he question God or say, "Lord. That's not possible. Look around. There's no possible way a flood could occur here?" Noah simply believed when God spoke. The same is true for Moses leading God's people and Abraham when he is told to sacrifice his son. To master the art, it's imperative that we first believe that what God says is true 110% of the time.

2. We master the art by learning His voice. It's the Good Shepherd chapter, John 10, where Jesus makes His point. "My sheep know My voice and they listen to Me." How many of you recognize voices on the phone? Before caller ID, listening was how we would often know who was calling before they finished their first sentence.

In the faith-realm, we master the art by learning to recognize His voice, by learning to sort His voice out of the crowd. With so many voices clamoring for our attention, mastering the art requires us to mentally sort, to determine which voices are of God, which audible voices are God speaking to us through the mouthpiece of another person.

3. We master the art by holding on to the faith. Near the end of the Epistle, the writer of Hebrews encourages us to hold fast to our hope. How many of you have ever played with slime, with the goey, slippery stuff that you can hardly hold in your hands? Because we live in a world that doesn't care about Christians and, even worse, is creating an increasing dislike for Christians, holding on to our faith is a lot like holding on to slime. One moment, we're pulled one direction; the next moment someone is pulling us another direction. To master the art of listening, we need to master the art of holding securely to our faith, of refusing to budge come what may.

4. We master the art by focusing. A bit earlier, I talked about distractions. Now, we need to focus on focusing. How many of you are good at multi-tasking, at doing multiply things at the same time? Our younger generation is an expert at multi-tasking, but there's a problem. Multi-tasking can easily distract us. When God speaks, He simply wants us to listen. He wants us to mentally sit at His feet and give Him our full and complete attention. To master the great art of listening, we need to master the art of focus, of single-tasking so that we hear His voice when He speaks to our hearts.

5. We master the art of listening by pondering His Word. Ponder. It's a word we associate with Mary at the birth of Jesus. In our hurried world, we hear what we need to hear as we rush to the next activity. One of the joys of cell phones is that we can listen while we are doing other things. But listening and pondering are different events. God wants us to listen, to take in the information, and then to ponder it. Once we have pondered, we are ready to take the next step. When the Father spoke those three words, "Listen to Him," He wasn't requesting a phone conversation, but an intense listening that includes a bucket full of pondering.

6. We master the art by expecting God to speak. How good are you at listening when you're not expecting someone else to speak? When we look at people, we observe clues that tune us in before they even say their first word. Although we may not hear the audible words, God still speaks today. Yet to hear His voice, to ponder His words, we need to expect God to speak to us, to our situation, to step into our messy world and speak the most profound words imaginable. To master the art, we anticipate, we prepare our hearts, we wait in expectation convinced that God wants to speak, that God will speak, that what God has to say will matter to us.

7. It wasn't just my mother that said, "Listen to me when I'm talking," but whether it were or not, our God daily steps into our lives as He says, "Don't stop now. Keep listening and one day, you will master the art of listening!" Amen.