

Text: John 11:17-45

Theme: When God Speaks...

April 2, 2017

A number of years ago, EF Hutton aired a commercial that used the slogan, "When EF Hutton talks, people listen," implying that EF Hutton possessed knowledge and power that everyone else lacked. Those of us from that era, still remember the slogan, yet we also know that EF Hutton doesn't have the knowledge or power that the slogan implied. In today's text, it's not EF Hutton who talks or who has power. It's Jesus who speaks with power, and when Jesus speaks amazing things happen.

I. When God speaks, miracles happen. A. But there's a problem; we think God has stopped speaking. 1. We think God has stopped speaking because we are unable to hear His voice. In our Old Testament lesson, Ezekiel heard the voice of God as God asked Ezekiel, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And in our Gospel, Jesus speaks to the dead as He says, "Lazarus, come out." Yet, as we listen today, do we hear the voice of God? Has God spoken to you recently in audible words? Because we don't hear Him speaking to us, because His power-filled words aren't echoing in our ears, we've come to the conclusion that God has stopped speaking, that He spoke then, but no longer now.

2. We think God has stopped speaking because we fail to see the evidence. When Ezekiel spoke, what happened? Those dead bones came to life and stood on their feet! When Jesus spoke to Lazarus, what happened? Lazarus came walking out of the tomb wrapped in his grave clothes! But then we look at our lives. We don't need dry bones to stand on their feet or dead people to walk out of their tombs. We just want some kind of evidence. Yet the evidence seems unavailable, and because the evidence isn't demonstrated in the same way as we see in our Gospel or Old Testament, it's easy for us to think that what God once did, He is no longer doing.

B. Although it may be occurring in a different way, God is still speaking. So, what happens when God speaks? 1. When God speaks, we witness the miraculous. In our Old Testament lesson, God chose to speak through Ezekiel and as Ezekiel spoke, that valley of lifeless bones came to life. Only a miracle could bring those bones to life and only a miracle could bring Lazarus out of the grave. Whether we see it today or not, we have proof that when God speaks, miracles occur. And if God can do one miracle, if He can do a single act that is beyond us, He can and will do the miraculous in us and around us, if we will only open our eyes and take notice.

2. When God speaks, He offers forgiveness. Look for a moment beyond Ezekiel and Lazarus. Look at the bigger picture. Why did God speak? Why did Jesus speak? To impress people, to get attention? Every word Jesus spoke ultimately came around to the same topic - forgiveness. The ultimate reason Jesus spoke was to forgive His people, to forgive you and me, to extend to us what we needed most, but were most unqualified to obtain. As Jesus on the cross says, "It is finished," His words declare that He had won, that He had finished His Father's work, that forgiveness, the most needed and necessary aspect of our lives, is available to you and to me.

3. When God speaks, our hearts listen. When those dry bones came to life, did that event reach the very heart and soul of Ezekiel? When Jesus spoke and Lazarus comes walking out of the tomb, did that moment reach to the very heart of each one of those present? Ezekiel, Mary, Martha, their lives were never the same again.

Even though we weren't present when those events occurred, they can and will reach our hearts if we will allow them to speak to us. Whether God is speaking audibly or through His Word, the power remains the same. When God speaks and we listen with our hearts, life will change because, when God speaks, hearts are impacted for eternity.

4. When God speaks, we receive comfort. As Lazarus walked out of that tomb, as those dry bones came to life, what message arrived in the hearts of those present at that moment? One message was the comfort of the resurrection. Lazarus was dead, but now he was alive. If that could occur, then the logical conclusion was that there was a resurrection of the dead, that there is an eternity. Look at what Mary and Martha learned in that moment. Look at what we also learn from this one moment. If this life isn't all there is, then we are comforted in our time of loss, comforted in life by the realization that there's more to life than the first hundred years. His power to bring life to the dead. What great comfort we find as God speaks.

C. Convinced that God still speaks, how do we respond? 1. We respond by believing in miracles today. For so many, the miraculous has disappeared because it hasn't occurred in their lives. Yet that doesn't prevent us from believing what we know in our hearts. God is still speaking through His Word. God is still doing the miraculous. When we believe God is still doing, God will still be doing what we believe He is doing. Faith says, "God can and will do whatever I believe God can and will do." By faith, we expect miracles. By faith, we call a miracle a miracle. By faith, we believe in the power of God because our hearts know of the power of God.

2. We respond by moving as a vast army. "So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet a vast army." Whether we are numbered in the hundreds or in the single digits, because we believe God is still speaking, we move. We say, "Here am I, send me." Every evidence of God's power is followed by empowerment, by His desire for us to move, to take what we have witnessed and move forward as His mighty army. Mary and Martha may have only been two individuals, but God had a mission for them following that moment. Likewise, God has a mission for you as He says, "Go. I will be with you!"

3. We respond by expecting God to step in. Mary, Martha, Ezekiel - did they expect God to step in? Did they believe that if God didn't step in, no one else could change the event before them? When you face your next event, whatever that event may be, expect God to arrive. Believe God will arrive. Believe God is already working behind the scenes. Trust that God is doing what you cannot do. Go to Him in prayer; pray for strength, for power to do what you can do until He provides His power, for the ability to hold on to your faith convinced God will arrive even when it looks like it's too late because God will always arrive at precisely the perfect moment.

4. Whether you or anyone else listened when EF Hutton spoke matters not. What matters in this moment is that we listen, that we believe, that we move, that we claim our place in that vast army whenever God chooses to speak. Amen.