

Choose to Listen to God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 July 2014

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 00] Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would first do a work in us. May your Holy Spirit fall upon us and do a work within us so that we might use the best of our mind and the best of our heart and the best of our will to think upon your word and to receive your word.

But Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would do a second and deeper work within us to humble us so that we will know, Father, that the best of our mind and heart and will is never enough, that we are dependent upon you to move and work and act in our lives, for you to bring your word deeply into us to form us.

So, Father, we ask for this double work of your Holy Spirit. Father, please have your Holy Spirit poured out upon us and deep within us. Make us good soil so that your word will come into our lives and bear much fruit in our lives for your glory.

And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Our service has a bit of a different...

The sermon always has a bit of a structure for this current series. Usually, the rest of the year, we'd be looking at bigger chunks of the Bible week in, week out. It would be the text that one of either myself or the other reader would read.

[1 : 28] But we're just looking at every week just a very, very short verse. And so, just to see it in context, I ask you to get your Bibles out. I'm going to read the text now that we're going to look at.

And I'll start a bit earlier so you get the context. And then I'll sort of point out the part that we're going to look at this morning. So, if you have your Bibles, please turn in them to 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 9 to 21.

If you've forgotten your Bible, there's always some Bibles here at the front, which you're welcome to use and or to keep afterwards if you'd like. And here's how the scripture text goes.

1 Thessalonians 5, verses 9 to 21. And by the way, this is all part of a series entitled Practical Discipleship. And today we're going to talk about choosing to listen to God.

Choosing to listen to God. And here's the text. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, that means either alive or dead, it's a metaphor, we might live with him.

[2 : 37] That's with Jesus. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up just as you are doing. We ask you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, admonish the disorderly, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all, see that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Holy Spirit.

Do not despise prophecies. But test everything. Hold fast what is good. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. And the text that we're going to be looking at today is those last few words which I read, verses 19, 20, and 21.

Do not quench the Holy Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. But test everything. Hold fast what is good. Now I'm going to do something unusual in my sermon today.

[4 : 00] I'm going to let you know where I hope we end up. You know, there used to be a joke that a three-point sermon was, I'm going to tell you what I'm going to say, and I'm going to say what I'm going to say, and then I'm going to tell you what I just said.

And that was sort of a three-point sermon. And I'm not quite doing that, but I want to, Jeremy, if you could put it up, I want, by the end of the sermon, to have us be able to say this prayer together or

have the Holy Spirit convict many of us to want to pray a prayer like this and to study something like this and pray something like this every day, that what this prayer describes as a reality would become more and more and more a reality in our lives.

And so, sorry, I want to end up with this is that we would be able to say something like, dear God, please help me to listen to you every day as I humbly read your word written.

Please help me to pray every day for your guidance and your wisdom. Please help me to listen for your answer. Please help me to dwell on your word written in the company of your people as I prayerfully consider your personal word to me.

As I hear you, please help me to trust you and put your word into action. Please help me to do all things for your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[5 : 25] Now, it sounds like a very simple prayer. And, you know, with any of these things, if I was to preach the same sermon, maybe several times, I could probably make the language a little bit better.

But here's the problem. On one hand, we can all say, George, I understand that. Yes, amen, sign me up. I'll pray it. And let's go on and get on with the rest of the service. Maybe sing a few more praise songs or something like that.

But here's the problem. The problem is both within the church and outside of the church. Quite a few years ago, there was a person who had a connection to many people in our church.

And I was sort of drawn into it. And people in my congregation, in this congregation, were very excited because she had very powerful prophetic gifts. And I, they brought me to meet her.

And first, they were telling me all of the things that she was saying, you know, the prophetic gifts and words that she was bringing into the congregation. And I went to meet her. And here's the problem. The very, very first thing that I thought when I met her was that she was mentally ill.

[6 : 29] And this, this was problematic. I don't know what you, where you are, but for my more charismatically inclined friends that were listening to her, they had a lot of suspicion that Anglicans don't believe in prophecy.

In fact, Anglicans don't really believe God speaks it. In fact, Anglicans don't even believe the Bible. So I was very, very, I was very conscious that if I was to be hesitant or try to speak a little bit about what might be going on here, that they would very quickly dismiss me.

At the same time, I was also very aware that the fact that, you know, God's an, God is an untamed God. His character is completely and utterly rock solid certain.

But God doesn't just stay according to our categories. He doesn't work through committees. In fact, most of the times in the New Testament or the Old Testament where there's a committee giving advice, the advice is usually wrong.

And so, but we tend to think that God speaks through institutions or committees or we're more comfortable with that. But, you know, God, you know, if you read the Old Testament, God's prophets do all sorts of wild and crazy things.

[7 : 42] So I have to be careful. I don't want to limit God. On the other hand, there's things about this person that make me believe that she in fact is having a psychotic incident and that she's mentally ill.

And it's very, very difficult. I don't want to quench the Holy Spirit. I don't want to despise prophecies. But on the other hand, just because somebody says they're speaking from God doesn't mean they are. And on the other hand, we all know of different people who really just do completely and utterly deny the fact that God can speak into individual lives in a fresh way today.

So how do we sort of balance that? How is it that we hear this word of the Scripture? Do you want to put the Bible passage up for us, Andrew? Just say it with me.

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. But test everything. Hold fast what is good.

So, you know, within the church, how do we sort of handle this text when, you know, there's some problems with this text, right?

And we all know other types of... I mean, when I was a younger man, one of my early... in my early Christian years, a fellow who became a Christian around the same time as myself, he got involved in a church that ended up getting really...

[9 : 02] I mean, it was a very, very controlling church that believed in shepherding, that the elder or several of the elders got words from God and they would tell these words from God to the different people in the congregation and basically control all of the decisions that these people made and, in fact, even controlled them so that they would have very little contact with outside Christian groups.

It was a very power-hungry and abusive situation and I was very concerned for my friend and eventually, after a couple of years of putting up with this, they finally crossed a line and his normal common sense came to bear.

But it scarred him for many years in terms of believing that God would speak prophetically or speak into people's lives because of the abuse of power, the appearance of wisdom and discipleship-making power of this guy.

It just deeply confused him for a long time. But outside of the church, we have problems as well. It really became evident, actually, in a funny way that God works. That God works.

When I was in the Starbucks yesterday trying to put the finishing touches to my sermon and early on in my time, a fellow came along beside me and asked me what I'm doing. He's a regular person that I talk to and he saw that I'm reading the Bible.

[10:19] I'm going to do a sermon on prophecies, etc. And he said, George, you know, he didn't say you're guys like you were a joke, but you could tell that's what he thought, you know.

He said, come on, George. Like there's all these prophets out there in the world and there's all these people saying all these different things and, you know, Islam says it's a prophetic word from God and Mormons say that and you say that.

Why on earth do you ever possibly believe that your word is the correct one? Like why on earth would you ever possibly believe that? Like the whole idea is absurd. At the same time, he would tell me about how the fact is that the human race, as you can see, he said in countries like Canada, United States, it's evolving and moving to a new level.

It's moving to a new type of reality where institutional religion has no power, where people can be spiritual without being in those types of connections and this is just the way things are moving, George.

This is the future and you should get with the program. And shortly after that, there was another fellow came in and sat in a different spot. I'd never seen him before, but he noticed that I was reading a Bible.

[11:27] I could tell that he noticed that I was reading a Bible and I could hear him sort of go up. As he passed me and he sat directly in front of me and he opened like this and put down a magazine that said skeptical thinking.

And he'd continue for the, I was there longer than he was. He'd keep looking over at me and I could, he didn't say harumph every time, but I could tell that he was, the eyeballs kept hitting the top of the, of the, of his skull and he was saying harumph.

He was reading skeptical thinking. I was reading the Bible. At the same time, not in this particular day, but just within the last week or two, I was talking to another person once again in Starbucks. I wouldn't talk to anybody if I wasn't in Starbucks.

No, I'll talk to you. I promise. You don't have to meet me in Starbucks for me to talk to you. But, you know, this particular barista is always listening to different types of prophecies and prophetic words about the future, all from completely non-Christian sources.

So here's the problem. When we have, say this text with me again. Do not quench the spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything. Hold fast what is good.

[12:47] So how do we listen to this text? How do we learn from it? What is it that the text is saying when we live on one hand in a world where many people will just completely and utterly dismiss this idea whatsoever in differing types of ways, not always dismissing it in the same way.

And within the church, on one hand, we realize that sometimes there's great abuses to text like this. So what is it that we have to do? How do we understand all of this? Well, here's the first thing that we need to understand.

If you could put the point up. I'll get my glasses so I can read it. Actually, I can see it up there. It is deeply human to want to hear the voice of God and it is deeply human to want to silence the voice of God.

It is deeply human to want to hear the voice of God and it is deeply human to want to silence the voice of God. Many of you know from your own experience how this is true at a very, very simple level.

How many of us come into a situation and we call out to God and we wish that he would just give us the word to say in this situation? And sometimes he does and sometimes we leave disappointed.

[14:00] Yet at the same time, and unless I'm just vastly more wicked than the rest of you, how many times are we proceeding on a course of action and it almost seems as if God is telling us not

to do it and we tell him to be quiet?

Or we realize that we're doing a particular course of action and it's almost as if we hear God speaking to us to do something, to maybe call somebody up and we don't do it.

We don't want him to interfere with what we're doing. And so if Christians are honest within themselves, they understand that it's deeply human to want to hear the voice of God.

We might think it's just a spiritual thing, it's just a thing for those who are Christians, but I think the Bible teaches that it's not just a Christian thing, that it's a deeply human thing to want to hear the voice of God and it's deeply human to want to silence the voice of God.

I mean, you go into chapters and the wide range of things on Wicca, on different New Age spiritualities are all different ways in a sense to connect to the divine.

[15:06] You know, even, and this is, I'd have a hard time, and I'm just going to say it to you very briefly and you might have to puzzle about it to get your mind around it, but in effect, often a lot of university studies and a lot of things which are believed in newspapers, which are all very, very secular, without them realizing it, what they're believing is a secular prophetic word.

And I'll explain what I mean by this. In fact, I'm not making a political comment here because it's a bit, it sounds a bit political in our current context, but it's a bigger type of problem.

That many people think they understand where history is going and that history is going to a particular place. And whether it's going to be a classless society, whether it's going to be a place of complete sexual liberation, whether it's going to be a place which is portrayed in all of the Star Trek movies, that basically our politics and our secular humanism and our technology and our technique has caused, has solved all human problems and human wars, or whether it's a classless society, whatever it is, whenever we have this sense, whether it's through capitalism or whether it's through technology or whether it's in terms of social processes or social movements, that history is going inevitably in a particular direction and we know that, only God could know that.

And so a Karl Marx is a secular prophet. Without us realizing it, he's making a claim of a type of knowledge that only God could possibly have.

And much of what passes for wisdom in the newspapers, much of what passes for wisdom in politics, is in fact a belief that they know the voice of God.

[17:03] And they know what God is calling human beings to do and they know where God is calling human beings to develop into. One of my friends that I was talking about yesterday, in fact even in his language about how human beings are evolving and how human beings are changing and where history is going.

I mean on one level, and we didn't have a chance to talk about this, on one hand, he dismisses the scripture text, but he believes he has some prophetic knowledge which has come from the editorial pages of the Ottawa Citizen or the New York Times or from some professor that he had when he was in university.

I'm not saying this to dismiss him, by the way, and I apologize if I sound like I'm dismissing it. I'm just saying that in fact, on one hand, within our culture, we want to hear and hear the voice of God and in a sense be able to act on the voice of God, yet at the same time, we want to be able to say to God, you can't speak into this.

How dare you try to speak into this? How dare you try to impose these types of limits on me? Even the whole move for many of our culture who are very deeply attracted by being spiritual but not religious, you know, partly it is that they still want to be able to hear from God, but they also don't want to hear from God.

You see, the Bible teaches that it's deeply human to want to hear the voice of God and it's deeply human to want to silence the voice of God. If you go back later on and read Genesis chapter 1, 2, and 3, you capture in a nutshell the beginning of the grand narrative of the Bible and that's what the grand narrative of the Bible teaches us.

[18:40] That in Genesis 1 and 2, it's taught to us that God creates us and he makes us in his image and in his likeness that every human being bears the image and likeness of the living God and so it is that there's this natural thing as me a creature and to know my creator that I bear the image and likeness of God and so do you and that that which is within me which bears the image and likeness of God that it longs to commune to that which is it is an image of.

And we see at the beginning of Genesis chapter 3 and the end of chapter 2 that God God made human beings to converse with him and to have communion with him and so because we always

bear the image and likeness of God there is this always draw and pull to that which we image and to the creator himself and then in Genesis 3 we see that as human beings in the person of Adam and Eve that they choose to be like God as God themselves to supplant God to become not only God's equal but maybe even God's superior to be like God themselves that the human race becomes bent and the image of God within us is not completely removed it isn't completely cut out of us it now becomes something which is bent and in Genesis 3 it's told in a very very powerful story that now human beings well on one hand they want to hide from God and now when they speak to God their speech is bent it's filled with blaming and they feel uncomfortable standing before God because of their nakedness and death enters into human affairs and different types of bondage enters into human affairs and so we see that at a very very fundamental level that human beings that exist now that desire to speak with God and to hear God is always there it doesn't matter who you are there is that desire to commune and know with God and at the same time there is this desire to silence God it's a human thing it's a human issue a human issue that the Bible I think more wisely than any other system of thought accounts for why it is that in an age like ours with science and all of that there is still such an interest in alternative spiritualities and astrology and all sorts of other things that on one hand don't fit with science and are completely contradictory to it yet we hold both the Bible makes clear it is deeply human to want to hear the voice of God and it is deeply human to want to silence the voice of God let's put the scripture text up again Jeremy say it with me do not quench the spirit do not despise prophecies but test everything hold fast what is good so here's the here's the here's the problem some people will say I've had many many people say to me well George you know here's the problem George you know all these gods that say things to you and then people have wars over these gods and they think they're better than other people because they hear the word of God and but George don't you actually think that I mean the high like even George your own mystics Christian mystics sometimes talk as if the highest type of union with God is completely and utterly speechless and wordless doesn't George even your own tradition sometimes teach that the highest form of spirituality is a form of silent union with God where there are no words George don't you think it's actually probably far just far more helpful given the problem that words supposedly from God have come in the human race to think that the real God that does exist must be a God that's a wordless God that's just like that God is everything that God is in you or in me that God is just like this energy which unites and brings people together it's like a force that brings people together and that's a far higher form of God and it's a very very common belief but here's what the Bible is telling us if you could put up the next point and I think that reason tells us this a God that cannot speak cannot be God the true and living God speaks and listens and acts a God that cannot speak cannot be God the true and living God speaks and listens and acts if I was to try telling my wife that I was no longer going to talk to her because we were going to just have wordless communion because that's higher well hopefully she'd just laugh and say George stop being silly you can try stop talking to me but I'm not going to stop talking to you and she'd be wise to say something like that you know in fact there are times in a couple that you know whether it's a married couple or a couple dating or just a couple of very very good friends where they can enjoy a very very silent time of communion with each other but those silent times of communion are built upon words the fact of the matter is is if we were to watch a science fiction movie and we were to be invited to some type of higher form of being and that's what everybody tells us and it can't it can't do anything or say anything it can't even communicate directly into our minds we would all we would all think and the viewers would all think well why is that higher than us it can't even speak if it can't even speak how can it be higher than or in a different type of science fiction movie if there's some creature that comes to earth to devour us and do all these things and it can't speak it might be something that we're afraid of it might be something that we have to fight but who would think that it's higher than us if it can't even speak and if we understand this at just a sort of a very very practical level then why is it that we would think that a God that can't speak or listen or act how could that God be higher than us and if it's not higher than us how could it be God one of the things that if you go back and read the Old Testament one of the things which is a regular comment of the Old Testament prophets about idols is they can't speak it's a sign that they aren't real

[25 : 22] Isaiah has a very very funny inviting comment about a guy who goes out into the woods and he cuts down a tree and part of the tree he uses to make a fire so he could eat and the other part of the tree he turns into an idol and he bows down and worships it to give him thanks for

everything without the person realizing that one moment you cut the tree down you made the idol why are you now praying to it and why are you bowing down to it so maybe our atheist friends are correct and there is no God maybe they are correct I think they're wrong but maybe they are correct and there is no God but surely common sense and the Bible teaches us that if what we think is God can't speak it surely can't be God we need to look somewhere else for God and the Bible teaches that the true and living God that truly lives and truly exists is a God who speaks he is a God who listens he is a God who acts if you go back later on and read 1 Thessalonians 5 9 to 21 and you'll see that just before this part here which is all about listening to God the three verses prior and we spent three Sundays on it you can go back and listen to the sermons are all about us speaking to God and if we if we can speak to God if the Bible is telling us to speak to God it not only implies that he can hear and understand but it definitely implies that he can speak to us and so after three texts which tell us to speak to God speak to God speak to God now we have a Bible text saying to us listen to the God who speaks the true and living

God speaks and listens and acts put the Bible passage up again please Jeremy let's say it together do not quench the spirit do not despise prophecies but test everything hold fast what is good now some of you might be saying okay George I'm a little bit confused you're still missing the sort of the point that that fellow in Starbucks gave you that you know it sounds awfully narrow to just think that only your God speaks why doesn't all the other you know all the other there's lots of other religions and you know is you know is Muslims believe that Muhammad God spoke to Muhammad directly and Mormons believe that that God brought these books to Joseph Smith like what like George what do you do with that well there's several things that we do and the first thing is this if you put the point up Jeremy since humans speak as God and the devil speaks as God and the true and living God truly speaks we need to test every claim of divine speech since humans speak as God and the devil speaks as God and the true and living God truly speaks we need to test every claim of divine speech that's the very very interesting thing about the

Bible passage that we're looking at is the Bible passage says it doesn't say don't listen to the don't even pretend to think that God speaks it isn't like the fellow reading skeptical thinking harrumphing at me but at the same time it's not be gullible in a sense it's like when I was having that trying to prayerfully discern what to do with those people in the congregation this is quite a few years ago who thought that their friend was having many prophetic words and by the way it eventually did come out that in fact she was suffering a psychotic episode that she did have a mental illness problem and it got cleared up and I don't think it caused any spiritual damage to anybody at least none of the Christians it might have caused some to some of the skeptical friends giving them yet one more reason why not to believe the Christian faith but God and his providence can work all of those things out but the Bible doesn't tell us to just shut up and to pretend to think that nothing happens nor does it say it's just to be gullible to any claim it goes beyond this text but the fact of the matter is that the devil can speak into people's lives and you know as we've seen already Karl Marx in effect is making a claim to have a type of knowledge like God has and you could go through all sorts of speakers Hitler thought that he in a sense knew the future completely and utterly wrong but in a world where there are many words that claim to come from God what the Bible is saying is that there are words that come from God so the Bible is telling us that that's the situation that we live in the situation that we live in is that there are many people who think that they are speaking words of God and whether they're just coming from themselves or whether they're coming from the devil but the fact is there is a God who speaks and so we have to test we have to test we don't we aren't gullible we shouldn't be gullible let's put the scripture text back up again say it with me do not quench the spirit do not despise prophecies but test everything hold fast what is good one time when a fellow at a Starbucks was asking me like why it was that I thought that my God was different my religion was different what I said to him was what is different is Jesus that the Christian faith out of all of the different types of all of the different religions and philosophies and theologies and spiritualities which may claim about speaking to God God speaking into their lives that only Jesus only Jesus only in Jesus does God actually provide in a sense an historical test that can be studied to ground the claims the Christian claim and that not only is there a historical claim of something central happening to the person of Jesus but it just doesn't happen out of the blue it doesn't happen with a whole pile of completely and utterly absurd beliefs that can't really explain or make anything understandable I don't know like the existence of aliens or that there are pink elephants or the trees speak it's not like there's a whole pile of ancient mythology

[31 : 55] I don't know that the whole world is resting on a turtle but that in a system of thought where the Bible contains just as I said with the Genesis 1 2 and 3 it's such a powerful story that explains so much of human life and affairs and it's also not just a powerful stories but there's powerful doctrines the doctrine of the fall the doctrine that good and evil that good is rooted in God's character that there's these powerful ideas that emerge from the Bible that explain so much of what human experience and human knowledge is like and it's also part of not only powerful stories and powerful ideas and a powerful overarching story of God making all things good and then human beings bringing evil into the world so that all things are bent and then God beginning to promise that he himself will do what human beings cannot do and we have the age of Israel and of the prophets and of the giving of the law and the age of the promise and then we have the coming of Jesus which is God keeping his promise in this first stage

God keeps his promise and fulfills all of these prophecies and this is vindicated in the person of Jesus by Jesus saying I have come to die and I will die and I will rise from the dead and then Jesus dies and rises from the dead and it ushers in this other period of the already not yet where people can know Jesus and in a sense hear God's final word for him and it's the age of the church and the promise of Jesus coming and the end of the story which is the beginning of the story which goes on for all eternity is the return of Jesus and the creation of the new heaven and the new earth new heaven and earth and in the midst of powerful stories and of powerful ideas and of powerful philosophy and of a large overarching story there stands the person of Jesus put the point up please true and in a world with millions claiming to speak for God the death and resurrection of Jesus Messiah is vindication that the person work and words of Jesus are true and trustworthy in a world with millions claiming to speak for

God the death and resurrection of Jesus Messiah is vindication that the person, work, and words of Jesus are true and trustworthy. I think it was just after the Second World War, there was a lawyer who decided he would put to death all nonsense of these claims of Christians of the historical reality of the death of Jesus upon the cross and his resurrection.

And he figured with his legal training, I think he was an Oxford grad or something like that as well, that he would be able to assess the evidence and write the definitive book to show that it was nonsense. And as he studied the evidence as it existed in those days, the surprising conclusion he came to was that not only was there solid historical evidence that Jesus lived, solid historical evidence that Jesus died, solid historical evidence that he was buried, that there was also solid historical evidence that the grave was empty, and that the most reasonable, rational explanation for the empty tomb was the resurrection of Jesus.

And the book that he was to write, to disprove the Christian faith, is available now. The name's author is Frank Morrison, and it's called Who Moved the Stone? And about 50 years after, 40 years after that book was written, another man, also legal training, an investigative journalist, winning many awards, decided he would do the same thing because to his complete and utter horror, his wife had become a Christian.

[35 : 38] And he decided that he was going to write the definitive book to show that there's no evidence for this Jesus person having risen from the dead. And the man's name is Lee Strobel, and the book he wrote is called The Case for Christ.

Without realizing it, he retraced the steps of Frank Morrison, and after a deep study, came to the conclusion that not only is it reasonable to believe that the death, that the resurrection, not only is it reasonable to believe that Jesus, the reason the grave was empty was because Jesus had risen from the dead, but that is the most reasonable answer.

I think it's G.K. Chesterton who once said, Christians believe in miracles because of evidence. Many people disbelieve in miracles because of doctrine.

G.K. Chesterton wrote over 100 years ago. And that's the thing which makes it different. Jesus, in the historical records of his life, says, I have come to die, I will die, I will rise from the dead.

And he tells in the historical record the purpose of his dying and rising. The accounts of how he institutes the Lord's Supper shortly before his death and resurrection is that he's doing this for the forgiveness of sins.

[37 : 03] He says he comes to seek and save the lost. He says he comes to free the captives. He comes to give life. He comes to reveal God.

Jesus claims that in him and in his death upon the cross, there is the most perfect and complete revelation of who God is.

That the great longing that many of us have that God is love is true. The great mystery that we have as to how God can be loved and how God can be completely good and completely just, without compromising any of those things, Jesus teaches that it's only in the cross that these mysteries come together.

And we see how God can both be completely good and completely just and completely loving and completely merciful and completely graceful of grace. Only in the cross is that made clear.

Only in the person of Jesus is that made clear. And so the Bible teaches that the resurrection of Jesus Messiah is the vindication of the person, work, and words of Jesus are true and trustworthy. [38 : 19] And that's why it is that we as Christians, put up the scripture text again. That's why we listen to this text and say it with me. Do not quench the spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything.

Pull fast what is good. Put up the next point, please. The Bible is the true and final word from the true and living God. And the Bible's account of the person and work of Jesus is the key to knowing God and his word written.

The Bible is the true and final word from the true and living God. And the Bible's account of the person and work of Jesus is the key to knowing God and his word written.

Jesus, if you go back and listen to the records of Jesus' life, that Jesus goes back and he says that that which we now call the Old Testament is the very word that comes from God.

Why do I believe that the Old Testament is a prophecy in a sense, a direct word from God into our human situation? Not because of, I believe it ultimately because that's what Jesus said.

[39 : 26] Why do I believe Jesus? Because I, in his death and resurrection, in the context of profound words and stories in the Bible and of ideas and doctrines that make so much sense and explain so much thing in a profound metanarrative, that Jesus is in the midst of all that, vindicating that and providing historical evidence for it.

And it's a revelation that's not just a revelation that's about knowledge, but it's a revelation about being coming united with God through what Jesus does on the cross, that God speaks to us to save us.

He speaks to us to call us back to himself that we might be his. And it's in the context of his love and his desire to have us be his that he reveals himself.

And Jesus says the words of the Old Testament are words that come from God. And Jesus says that my words will not be forgotten. That's the reason why Christians believe that the New Testament is ultimately from God himself.

And it's only by knowing and understanding Jesus and what he did for us on the cross and his resurrection that the Bible makes sense and that God can be truly known. And that God can be truly known.

[40 : 32] Now here's the issue for us as we sort of bring this sermon to a close. You could put up the next point. God is always more willing to speak to me than I am willing to listen to him.

God is always more willing to speak to me than I am willing to listen to him. Every single one of us can probably share lots of stories of abuse of people who say they have the words of prophecy or they hear the words from God.

That we could probably have a very interesting coffee time discussion of really, really, really dumb things and really, really evil things that Christians have done claiming to hear from God.

We could probably share many, many stories like that. But my suspicion is that when we get to heaven and God speaks into my life and speaks into my life about, you know, he's letting me into heaven because of what Jesus has done for me on the cross, we're still going to help make clear to me the meaning of my life and what went on in my life.

And I bet God will confront me far more about the times that I refused to listen to him than about the times that it was abused. That I will probably be shocked if God was just to replay my life and say, you know, George, see that?

[41 : 58] I told you not to do that and you went ahead and did it. And you heard me, didn't you? And George, you were doing this and I told you you should be going and maybe saying that word or maybe making that apology and you didn't do it, did you?

But you knew that, didn't you, George? And you know, George, that time you asked me for wisdom about a particular point in your sermon and George, didn't I right away put an idea in your head and didn't you completely and utterly ignore it and do something that you thought would make a bigger,

in your feeble, God can say that to me, your feeble mind that you thought would be better and you asked for my help and I gave you help right away and you didn't use it, did you?

And my guess is that when we get to heaven, God's going to spend vastly more time with us refusing to listen than those times that we invented listening or abused it.

God is always more willing to speak to me than I am willing to listen to him. The Holy Spirit, to put the text back up, Jeremy, say it together with me, do not quench the spirit, do not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast what is good.

You see, don't despise the fact that God speaks. God is far more willing to speak to you and me than we are, than I am to listen than you are to listen and the Holy Spirit is the means by which God speaks to us, brings God's word home to us and brings us personal words of direction, guidance as well.

[43 : 32] And so to not want to hear God speak is to, in a sense, to say that the Holy Spirit has no role in our lives and that God's to have no role in our lives.

Here's the final point. Put it up, please, Jeremy. God can speak directly to us and he can speak through other people, but each word, I would now maybe say personal word if I was to write it again, each personal word must always be weighed by the prayerful, communal reading of God's word written.

You see, the main way that we start to be able to hear the word of God is by actually learning how to just hear the Bible because we know we can depend upon this being the way that God speaks. You know, if you think that God is telling you to cheat on your wife, I don't have to spend time in prayer discerning whether that's the case.

It's very clear from the Bible that God's not calling you to cheat on your wife. Okay? We don't have to pray and fast over this issue. He's not calling you to cheat on your wife.

[44 : 49] Okay? But whether he's calling you to do something more specific, whether he's calling you to become a missionary or whether he's calling you to take this job or whether he's calling you to do a particular thing, you know, those are the types of things that over time as you build your muscles and being able to hear, you learn by hearing by actually hearing the word and hearing the word shared and talked with other people and hearing it opened in church and other places where hopefully the people are trustworthy.

And then that means that not everything that comes into you as a word from God is something that you necessarily have to get some type of feedback in. Just this week, I had a meeting a little while ago, a couple of weeks ago, and I realized, it was that God just spoke to me on Friday and he said, you know, George, in that meeting, you said this, and I know it was in joke, and I know everybody laughed, but you shouldn't have said that and you need to apologize.

And I don't need to get prayerful discernment over that. Hopefully, I'm going to see this person within the next couple of days. If not, I'm going to call them and I'm going to apologize. I don't need to get prayerful discernment or communal discernment because that's a very simple type of thing. But in general, as God speaks not only about specific types of things, you need to go in to apologize. You need to do this, you need to do that. Those are things that as you read God's word, you can just hear them as personal words and direction, guidance, and wisdom from God that you are to go towards.

But other things which might be very, very bigger and have bigger types of consequences, those are often things that you need to have some time on. A couple of years ago, there was a woman during one of the church services.

[46 : 26] After the sermon was over, she came up to me and she said to me, George, I think God is calling me to confess before the church my adultery. So she came up.

I was sitting in the front row. She came up behind me and she said that. And I said, well, why don't we both pray about this for a week or two? And if it seems as if God is still calling you to do this, we'll let you do it.

And so there was some behind-the-scenes conversation and we ended up discerning that that was what she should do and she did it. But that's a pretty dramatic step, you know?

Not just something just because in a sermon you get an idea or in a church service yet I should just jump up and do it. That has bigger repercussions and it was the right thing to do.

I feel very comfortable that there was that time of extra discernment about it. And she did the right thing in coming to speak to me and I had her speak to obviously another person about it and it ended up it was the right thing to do.

[47 : 29] And that's why it says God can speak directly to us and he can speak through other people but each personal word must always be weighed by the prayerful communal reading of God's word written. Now we're going to close with two prayers and we're going to close with a prayer hopefully after all of this you would like to join with me in praying that every day you will spend time in God's word and that you'll learn to speak to God and listen to God and recognize the voice of God and receive wisdom and guidance from God.

But there's one other prayer that some of us might want to pray first. Could you put it up please? The first prayer. You know the fundamental way that we really definitively hear the voice of God? It comes from the book of Revelation chapter 3 and there's this image of how the Christian life begins and many of us have spent many years in church and maybe we've been in and out of churches and we might even have a great fondness for Jesus and we see it but the Bible paints this picture in Revelation 3 of Jesus standing at the door of our life and he knocks on the door and he's saying George please let me come in to be your savior and your Lord.

And I might be very content looking through the keyhole and getting a glimpse of Jesus every once in a while and getting very excited. I might like to talk to Jesus through the door. I might like to slip Jesus' notes through underneath the door.

and I might actually think I've had more profound mystical experiences than other people because I know of times when I've slipped notes through the door to Jesus and he's done remarkable things.

[49 : 11] But all the time and maybe there are some here today who realize that Jesus even though this doesn't seem to be a very evangelistic sermon that even now you realize that Jesus has been knocking on the door of your life.

And the Bible says that when he knocks on the door of a life that what he's asking is he's asking and you can maybe if you're an imaginative person you can just picture it that inside of who you are you hear the voice the knocking of Jesus and you open the door and Jesus looks at him and said I've been knocking on your door for all your life.

Can I come in and be your savior and your Lord? And you look at Jesus and you say Jesus please come into my life. I've opened the door. Come into my life and be my savior and my Lord.

And if there is a person here today who's heard that knocking but not responded to it there's no better time than right now to ask Jesus to come into your life.

So I'd like everybody to stand and if I'm not asking to pray it out loud it's just between you and God it's between you and Jesus and I only put this prayer up here to help put into words how you could say to Jesus but I'm going to say it and if the God is speaking into your life if you realize that Jesus is knocking at the door of your life and you've never done it could you pray this along with me please knowing that you're not praying it to me but you're praying it to Jesus and if you ask Jesus to come into your life the savior and Lord he will.

[50 : 41] Dear Jesus I hear you knocking on the door to my life please help me to open the door of my life to you. please come into my life as my savior and my Lord please save me please be my Lord I thank you that you will make your home in me and never leave me or forsake me Amen You've prayed that prayer for the first time or maybe in a way that really feels like it's the first time one of the best things you can do before the service is over but before you leave this building is just tell somebody that you've prayed it and it's a very very powerful thing and then give me a call or any of the Daniel or Jeremiah up at the front or maybe the coffee people and we'd love to maybe just chat with you later on about getting you moving along in the way talk to Brian who's he'll be helping with communion he'd love to talk to you as well after the service if that's a prayer that you've done for the first time and if you pray that for the first time then you really need to pray this second prayer you can put it up you can see it in two parts and I'm inviting you to pray along with me out loud if this is what's the cry of your heart to hear God speak into your life you know the fact that there's all these other claims of other things you might have intellectual doubts from outside you might have been burned by people who claim to be prophets in your past but God is calling you to not just not to despise prophecies and set them aside and quench the Holy Spirit but to realize that not only has God spoken definitively through his word to you but he gives you personal words of guidance and wisdom and direction and he wants you to hear it so if God is putting it on your heart to pray then please join me in praying dear God please help me to listen to you every day as I humbly read your word written please help me to pray every day for your guidance and your wisdom please help me to listen for your answer please help me to dwell on your word written in the company of your people as I prayerfully consider your personal word to me as I hear you please help me to trust you

and put your word into action please help me to do all things for your glory in Jesus' name amen
father this is the cry of our heart

I ask that your holy spirit would come and move mightily in our lives and seal this to us and help us
to live this prayer as individuals and as a church and this we ask in Jesus' name on