

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

January 23, 2000

Scripture: Philippians 1:9-11

Sermon: "How Can I Hear What God Wants Me To Do?"

A significant portion of my time is spent in talking with people one-on-one and in those conversations trying to answer questions or trying to be of some help to them as they are seeking God's guidance in their life. I began to realize several months ago that in this past year I have perhaps spent more time talking with people about the issue of how can I know God's will for my life? - I need God's direction for a decision that I am making. I realize that if I am getting that many people who come specifically to talk to me, how many people must there be in church services on Sunday who are dealing with the same issues. And so this morning I want to talk about how you can hear God talking to you. I want to read for you a passage of scripture out of the Book of Philippians in Chapter 1: 9-11. It is one of those prayers of Paul in which he is praying for people - and certainly I pray it for myself and I pray it for you. And this is what he said, "And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best that you may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness that come through Jesus Christ to the glory and the praise of God."

One of the big questions that people ask about God is, "Does God communicate to people?" Most people believe that when we talk to God that he hears us and that God answers our prayers. But the question that people ask me all the time is, "But, does God talk to us? Does God communicate his will and his purpose to us?" This past week you might have read that the scientists in the national space program quit trying to communicate with the Mars explorer satellite. It cost \$163 million dollars and just as it was getting ready to land on Mars, it went silent. They used every sophisticated method that they knew, but they never received any communication back. That's the question that people ask me. "I'm always sending up words, I'm always praying. What I want to know is, does God communicate his will back to me and if so, how can I know it?"

Years ago in the country of England there developed a philosophy that said something like this. God created the world. He made it with all of its laws and principles. He wound it up in essence like a clock and then God went off and left it. Well, if you believe that, then you do not believe in a personal God, a personal God who cares about you and a personal God who wants to reveal his will to you. And many people in England did begin to believe it and they stopped going to church because it's very difficult to go to church if you realize that when you talk to God all you hear is the sound of mechanical gears that are turning in the universe.

The question we keep asking ourselves is, "I talk to him, but how can I know he is talking to me and how can I know his will for my life?" The best way of course to find an answer to that question is to turn to scripture. The scripture you know is 5,000 years of men walking with God and out of that 5,000 years of experience you begin to open its pages and ask the question, "In this book, are there stories of God communicating with man?" Well, let me just open up to the first part of the Bible. In the first eleven chapters of the first book of the Bible, there are four stories. Story number one is the story of God and Adam and Eve. Listen to what the Bible says. The Bible says that at the end of every day, God came to the Garden and he walked with Adam and Eve. One day when he came, they didn't come running out to him because they had sinned. God turned to Adam and he said, "Where are you?" The very essence of what you turn to in the first story in the Bible is God wanting to be with people, God wanting to talk with people, and God even asking people questions.

The second story is about their two children, Cain and Abel. They came to a place of worship, they brought their offering and here's what you hear God saying. "I'm sorry I cannot accept your gift." Almost immediately when they came to worship, God talks back to them.

The third story is the story of Noah and the flood. And the Bible says very clearly, *and God looked upon all the men and realized how evil they were and God said, I am going to have to destroy the world.* Now the way we make sense out of the flood is that we read the Bible and we know that God communicated to us what his purpose and his will is.

The fourth story in the Bible is the story of the Tower of Babel. Man tried to build a tower that would go all the way to God and God looked down and he says, you know what I am going to have to do? I'm going to have to scatter men upon the face of the earth and give them all kinds of different languages. Well, how do we know where the languages of the world came from and why are they different all around the world? Well, the Bible says God communicated to us. Listen to how the Bible comes to a conclusion. In the book of Hebrews this is the way it starts. God, in various ways and in many different times, has communicated to us and in these last days, has communicated to us by his Son. So what you can learn from the Bible is that God does communicate to people and that he can

communicate to you. Now some people say, "That's very nice, Pastor, but I tell you what. He talked to all those real spiritual people in there and I'm not very spiritual." Well, not hardly. He talked to Moses and Moses was a man who was fleeing because he was a murderer. He talked to people of all ages. He talked to people who were young people and to older people. He talked to both genders. He talked to people who were spiritual and not spiritual. He talked to people who were running towards him and he talked to people who were running away. And the amazing thing is that God communicates to all kinds of people in all kinds of circumstances. And the really amazing thing about it is that instead of us trying to get God to talk to us, most of the Bible is about God trying to get us to listen to Him - that God has always taken the initiative, that God is always trying to communicate to us and that if we will listen to Him, then God will communicate in a language that we can understand.

We have people in this congregation who work for Virginia Power. They have all of this power at our disposal. As you know it runs through the lines, it comes through switches, it comes through fuses and when I go home in a little while, I'll flip one little switch and it will turn on one little light bulb. All of that power then is for my use. And here is God who wants to come to you and says, "I am communicating all the time; but listen, I will make it personal, I will speak to you, I will communicate to you if you will learn to listen to me." So let me give you some principles of God's word that will help you to learn how to listen to Him so that when you hear Him talk you will know His will and his purpose for your life.

The first principle is - God will always communicate with you in a way that is consistent with His word. So if you go to God and you say, "God, here is what I want to know or God, I'd like for you to help me in this circumstance", and you already know that it is not in line with His word, then you're not going to hear anything. Because what He will say to you is, "I've already made that clear."

Years ago a lady came to me. She said, "I'd like your advice on a matter." She had been married three times. She had just re-married to a man who had taken her as his wife, with her four children and he was raising them. She said, "Let me tell you what happened to me. The other day I was in the grocery store. It was a store I never did go to very often and as I was going down the aisle, I looked up and saw my first husband," she said. "I thought he lived in Arizona and here he was by the Corn Flakes box - I mean, it was just so surprising to me", she said. "We said, Hello, and the next thing we knew we had decided that the best thing to do was to get re-married. So she came to me and she said, "Pastor, I've been praying about this and I haven't gotten an answer. Do you think it's God's will that I leave my present husband and go back to my first husband?" And so I asked the question, "Well, what about your children?" And she said, "Well, I'm going to leave my kids and I'm going back with him." And so I said, "You know you've been coming to church a long time. What do you think the Bible says?" She said, "Well, I'm not interested in what the Bible says, I'm interested in what you think." And I said, "What I think is not important if it is not what the Bible says." And so I said, "The Bible would never say to leave children, to destroy families, to go back over there." And then she said this. She said, "But, Pastor, do you know how miraculous it was that after all of these years we would end up at the same store, at the same time, at the same place!"

I want you to listen carefully. The Bible warns you all the time that the devil also creates circumstances just like God does. You can never always determine God's will by the circumstance. You can only determine God's will if it is in agreement with His word. So if you go and ask Him and you begin to say, "Can I be prejudiced? I don't like my neighbor. Do I have to get along with my neighbor? They sent me the wrong check in the mail and I suddenly have \$1,000 I have been praying for." Listen. When you talk to God you're not going to get an answer. God communicates only to us when it is in accord with His word.

The second principle you need to know.- God communicates to us only when we are seeking those things that are in His plan and best for us. One of the joys I have often is that some of my grandchildren come home. One day some of them were home and I was out barbecuing and I had a very sharp knife so I could cut the meat to see if it was ready. One of my grandsons came up and he says, "Can I have that knife?" I said, "No, I don't think so. I've learned the trick so what I say is, "I don't think your Mother would like that." So we went into the "second stanza": "but I want it." And I said, "I'm sorry." And I went all through the way knives are made and you know the point and how if you run it could hurt you. I used everything that I could. Stanza #3 - jumping up and down - "I want the knife!" So again, I've learned the lesson, - "Why don't you go talk to your Mom about that. And if your Mom thinks it's all right then I'll be glad to give it to you." Well, of course he didn't get the knife.

As silly as that story is, I find people doing that all the time with God. God, I want this. "I'm sorry, you can't ..." I need this. I must have this." And your problem is that we cannot see to the end of the day, much less to the end of the year. But God can. And God will come to us and say, "I'm sorry you can't have that. That's not in the best plan that I have for you." So if I keep asking and I do not receive an answer then the answer probably is that's not a part of God's plan and purpose for my life. That's not what's best for me. He will respond to me when I'm asking for those things that are in His will best for my life.

The third thing that you can know about finding God speaking to you and God's guidance in your life is that God does not speak to us when we try to use God as some people try to use a psychic. The other day I just happened to be looking on television and saw this very attractive lady who was asking everybody to call in to a certain '800' number and you could find out your future. Well, I had heard a lot about that, I just hadn't taken time to listen to it, so I decided to listen. And this is what people were asking. They were wanting to know about romance in their life, they were trying to know about what stock to buy. One lady said that she thought she was going to win an exciting vacation and she wanted to know whether she ought to go buy a bathing suit or not. One was asking about what stock to buy - whether it would go up or do down. One lady had lost her ring and she wanted to know if she could call and they could help her find the ring. And on and on

What I began to realize is this. In the Book of Deuteronomy it talks about people who treat God as though he is the answer man to all of their little questions. And what people ask so many times is, "God, all I want is information, I don't want a relationship." So we need to understand that God is not in the business of giving out little information that will take us away from the way He has made us and that is, He has encased us with time. If you want to get out of time where you can get all of the answers, where you don't have to walk day by day trusting in Him and believing in Him, then you're asking the wrong thing.

The next thing that we need to know is - God will communicate to us if we are not trying to put him to a test. Let me give you a little illustration. When Jesus was on earth you recall that the devil came to Him and he said, "What I'd like for you to do is acknowledge that you are the Son of God, but", he said, "I want to take you to the top of the temple." Now for those of you who have been in Jerusalem, you remember the temple was on the side of a huge hill and way down is a valley. So he took him all the way up to the top and you could almost get dizzy imagining being up there and he said, "I tell you what you do. Why don't you jump off and the Bible says that God will send angels so you won't hit the bottom." And Jesus said, "No, the Bible says you will not put God to the test." Now let me show you what this means to your life. If you're a college student, and you do not listen to the professor, you don't take notes, you don't do homework, you don't read the assignments and you come on the day of final exam and you say, "Oh God, help me out," I tell you what you are going to hear - nothing. If you think you can manipulate God when you haven't done what you ought to do and that God is going to come in and work a miracle to get you out of the mess that you have created, then many times you are going to find the answer will not come.

The next principle - God communicates to us when we don't try to always bargain with Him. Now what you will find is that God cannot be manipulated. Often I hear people say, "I will do this, God, if you will do this." Now we always reverse it and we always say, "I will do only after you will do." You might recall that in the Old Testament there is a story about a man by the name of Jacob. Jacob was always in trouble in the early part of his life and he got in so much trouble at home that he and his brother crossed swords with each other and so Jacob had to run. So the first night out, here is a remarkable vision that God gave him. It was so remarkable that even Jesus talked about it. And after this remarkable vision this is what Jacob said to God, "Dear God, if you will take me to where I need to go, if you will protect me and guide me and if you will bring me back then I will"

If you are always in the "but, if you will, then I will" mode then you've just turned it around. What God wants us to do is this. I come to Him and I say, "God, I want to do it your way. I want to do your will." Now reveal that to me and I will do it. God, it's no if, and, or but about it - here I am, ready to do your will. It is then the Bible says that God can communicate to us.

And this leads us to the next one and that is, that God communicates to us clearly when we come and say, "Dear God, what I want to do is be surrendered unto you." Let me ask you a question. You are asking for light in the future. How much are you walking in the light that you know right now? The principle that I have found is that God gives more light to those who are following in the light they now have. If I have been running from Him, if I have been turning from Him and then I come and I say, "Dear God, here is one little part of my life, I'd like your answer for this." Then God comes back and says, "What about the rest of your life? Why don't you give all of your life to me? If I'm good enough for one answer in your life, am I not great enough for all of your life?" And God will be able to communicate to us whenever I come to Him and say, "Dear God, here I am. I want to give myself to you, work out your will and your purpose in my life." Then you will begin to find He can begin to communicate to us.

Here is the last one - God can communicate His will to me when I accept His will and leave the consequences up to Him. The children of Israel are getting ready to walk toward the Red Sea. God says, "I want you to walk toward the water." Well, they said the same thing you would have said. "Well, God if you'll open up the water, I'll be glad to do that. If you'll work out all the details, I'll be glad to do that. You take care of every situation, you work it all out. After you get it all worked out, I'll be glad to do it." He said, "What did I tell you to do? I want you to do my way and my will. Leave the rest to me. I will work it out for you."

I don't know how many people I have dealt with through my life, of young people who got ready to go to college who said, "I can't go to college." I said, "Why can't you go?" "I don't have any money." "I don't know many

people who do have the money to go to college. The big question is, before we talk about money, before we talk about where you want to go to school, let me ask you a question. Do you think that God wants you to go? “Yes, but Pastor you understand, I don’t have this and I don’t have that” “But the question is, does God want you to go?” “Yes.” Then what you need to do is walk toward the door and let God take care of the details. But if I’m sitting around waiting for God to work everything out in my life so that I don’t have to exercise any faith, or that I don’t have to trust in Him, then of course He’s trying to say one thing when I’m trying to get Him to say something else. I have come to the deep conviction in my life that God does communicate His will to people’s lives. Now I’m not saying that God speaks in audible voices, though in the Bible he does. But He doesn’t have to speak in audible voices. There are many ways you can communicate to somebody that you don’t speak in an audible voice. When I was in growing up, in our family there were four boys and when we got in a fight and our Daddy walked in he didn’t have to say a word. Sometime in my home my family can communicate to me and never say a word. And God impresses on people’s lives directions and wills and plans and purposes and God can communicate in your life. The question again that you need to ask your self is not, is God talking to you; the question is are you spending time to listen to Him? He wants to communicate to you. He wants His will done in your life. God is not some emotional sphinx in the heaven that you have to go search out every day. God wants to talk to you a lot more than you want to talk with Him. So take time with Him and listen to Him. My whole life as far as what I do for a calling is based upon the fact that God communicates to people. I am very well aware that when people come, like you have, on a snowy Sunday morning, you haven’t come to listen to me talk. You’ve come to listen to what we call in worship, the other voice. You’ve really come to hear a word from God and what I understand is that when I talk that God then overrides my words, uses my words, goes around my words, and God communicates to you and in worship you can hear the “other voice”. This is what I have found - that God always gives the best to those who leave the choice up the Him.

[break in tape here } ... come day by day and say not my will but Thy will, not this little part of my life, but all of my life. I come to give it to you and to ask for your direction and your guidance. God then will do far more for you than you ever imagined. He has grace and love that He wants to give to you far beyond what you could ever even think about asking. I pray that God will communicate to you and that you will hear him very clearly.