

Discipleship: Knowing God's Voice Well: the Bible Part 4C

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I. Introduction

What do you hear God say as you read the Bible? Do you just see words on a page or do you hear His voice speaking to you? Does it take your anxiety away when you meditate on what He said? God's Word can deliver you from anything, but the question is do you engage it as if it's real, as if He's speaking directly to you and as if His power to save you is actually real. Or do you just see some neat promise found in a book called the Bible?

II. Discipleship: Knowing God's Voice Well: the Bible

The Bible is known as God's Word; it's His voice. However, when you read the Bible you shouldn't be thinking, "What is God saying?" but "What is God saying *to me*?" The Bible is God's message, but it's His message to *you*. He's trying to tell *you* something. As you read the book of Philippians, what do you hear God saying? If you happen to be struggling with anxiety, depression, or anything else, what do you hear Him say?

Before Paul wrote Philippians, what did he hear God say? When you get to the end of Philippians, Paul says some incredible things. He says, "No matter what happens, stand strong in your Christian identity because you and Christ are literally one. You stand with Him; He stands with you; He's got your back 24/7/365 (4:1)." "You should always rejoice, no matter what life throws at you! (4:4)" "You should always be kind and courteous to everyone, no matter how they treat you (4:5)." "You should never be anxious about anything, instead, tell God your problem and His peace, which is beyond comprehension, will protect you from all worry and anxiety (4:6-7)." "No matter what you face, rest assured that you will be able to handle it because Christ will give you the power to do it (4:13)." "No matter the need, God will provide everything you need out of his endless wealth and power through Jesus Christ (4:19)." What drove Paul to say such incredible things? As Paul looked at himself, Jesus, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and even the Philippians (1:1-3:21), he knew that God kept His promises no matter what. He knew that God could deliver you from unbelievable suffering (1:12-18), death threats, prison, government rulers, and even death itself (1:19-26), persecution (1:27-30), unimaginable pain and suffering (2:5-11), the trials and tribulations of ministry (2:19-24), near death experiences (2:25-30), attacks from religious zealots (3:2-7), losing everything in life (3:8-11), wanting to give up and take the easy way out (3:12-19), your body breaking down and life after death (3:20-21), stress and anxiety (4:6-7), and poverty and wealth (4:10-20).

Paul knew this firsthand because before he ever wrote Philippians he went through amazing suffering (Acts 9-28). And it all began with Jesus telling him that instead of persecuting Christians, he would now be His #1 evangelist and apostle to the Gentiles and in the process would suffer greatly (Acts 9:16).

Acts 9, before he was known as the apostle Paul, he was Saul of Tarsus: on his way to persecute more Christian, Jesus met him, converted him, and explained to him that his life would now be full of suffering (9:9, 15-16). Soon after, they tried to kill him twice (9:23-25, 26-30). What did Paul hear the Lord say as he faced these attempts on his life and saw the disciples and Barnabas come to his aid (see 9:15 and 22:12-21 [Philippians 4:1, 6-7, 13])?

Acts 11, what did Paul—the former persecutor of the church—hear when the Lord made him one of the leaders of the church in Antioch (11:25-30)!

Acts 13, as Paul began his missionary journeys, what did he hear when he saw that it was God's very Spirit who commissioned him and sent him out (13:2, 4)? What did he hear when a sorcerer opposed him, when he struck him blind, and then the Governor of Paphos believed in Jesus (13:6-12, cf. Philippians 4:1, 6-7, 13)? What did he hear when 100's, perhaps 1,000's of Jews and Gentiles came to faith in Christ while at the same time many other fellow Jews and city rulers drove him out of the city (13:46, 51 [Philippians 4:1, 6-7, 13])?

Acts 14, what did he hear the Lord say when he saw many Jews and Gentiles come to faith in Iconium but then faced violent opposition from other Jews, Gentiles, and the city officials (14:3 [Philippians 4:1, 6-7, 13])? What did he hear and then do when he was chased out of Iconium, went to Lystra, healed a guy, is worshipped as a god, Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and persuaded a giant mob to stone him to death, his body was then dragged outside the city but then he came back to life (14:21-23—he goes back to the very cities that persecuted and killed him!! [Philippians 3:10; 4:1, 4, 6-7, 13])?

Acts 15, what did he hear the Lord say as he recounted miracle after miracle at the Jerusalem Council (15:12 [Philippians 3:10; 4:4, 13])?

Acts 16, what did he hear when he wanted to go Asia or Bithynia but the Holy Spirit prevented him? What did he hear when he saw a vision of a Macedonian man pleading for him to come to Macedonia (16:6-10)? What did he hear when a wealthy woman in Philippi came to faith in Christ and offered to help Paul out of her wealth and resources (16:11-15 [Philippians 4:19])? What did he hear when he cast a demon out of a slave girl, was badly beaten by the people and leaders of Philippi, was thrown into prison, was freed by the Lord through a miraculous earthquake, the jailer tended to his wounds, and the leaders of Philippi, now terrified of Paul, begged him to leave (16:18, 25-26, 27-40 [Philippians 4:4, 6-7, 13])?

Acts 17, what did he hear when a multitude of Jews and Gentiles in Thessalonica came to faith in Christ, but then he had to escape a violent mob instigated by fellow Jews, so he fled to Berea and found Jews more receptive to him and his message of Christ, but then is chased out of Berea by the same Thessalonian instigators (17:2-4, 5-15 [Philippians 4:1, 6-7])?

Acts 18, what did he hear when he went to Corinth and faced similar opposition but many come to faith in Christ anyway and then the leader of that opposition was badly beaten (18:5-11, 12-17 [Philippians 4:1, 6-7, 13])?

Acts 19, what did he hear when he went to Ephesus and faced more opposition but the saving Word of God spread to all of Asia anyway (19:8-10). What did he hear when hordes of Ephesians come to faith and renounce their witchcraft (19:11-20). What did he hear when the entire city of Ephesus was in an uproar and out for blood over his preaching of Christ but then the city clerk steps in and defuses the whole situation (19:21-41 [Philippians 4:6-7, 13])?

The book of Acts doesn't detail all of Paul's suffering. At the beginning of Acts 20, between his arrival and departure from Macedonia, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. In that letter Paul mentioned many trials and suffering that aren't recorded in Acts: *in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness* (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

Acts 21-22, Paul suffered all this and there was more to come; it would be another six years before he found himself in prison in Rome which is where he wrote Philippians. His trip to Rome began with him being beaten so bad that he couldn't stand up and his response to this beating was to give that violent mob the Gospel. Why would he show such kindness to this violent mob; what did he hear the Lord say as he faced this mob (21:26-22:21 [Philippians 4:1, 5])? And what did he hear when the Roman commander decided to interrogate him with torture in order to find out why this mob wanted him dead but then he and his soldiers back away in fear once they discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen (22:24-29 [Philippians 4:1, 6-7, 13])?

Acts 23-28, Paul spent years in prison, was tried before Jewish officials, governors and kings, he was then placed on a ship bound for Rome, the ship is torn to pieces by a storm but every single passenger reached the island of Malta alive, finally, Paul is bitten by a deadly viper but he survives. What did he hear the Lord say through all this? He heard Him guarantee that he would reach Rome, that nothing, not Jewish officials, not Roman officials, not a hurricane, not a deadly shipwreck, not a deadly viper, nothing would stop him from reaching Rome (23:11; 26:32 [King Agrippa almost becomes a Christian through Paul's testimony!]; 27:21-26).

Can you see why Paul would tell you to stand strong, to always rejoice!, to always be gentle and kind to everyone, to never be anxious about anything, that you can do all things through Christ's strength, that the Lord will always supply everything you need? Though Paul went through terrible suffering and anxiety, Paul heard the Lord say over and over, "I've got your back, stand strong Paul. Don't let anything get you down, instead always rejoice! Don't get anxious about anything, death or otherwise. You can and will survive everything through My strength. And I will provide everything you need, always!" (Philippians 4:1, 4, 5, 6-7, 13, 19).

How did Jesus face His suffering and anxiety? Jesus was the first to model this way of life. As He faced the worst agony, sorrow and anxiety of His life, He found perfect peace and the courage and strength to face it all (Matthew 26:36-56; Luke 22:44 [Philippians 2:5-11; 4:1, 4, 5, 6-7, 13, 19])?

But this doesn't just work for Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, it works for you too. God's promises are backed by His power, which is real and will deliver you from everything.

III. Conclusion

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.