

January 16, 2022

"We Speak, God Listens"

1 Kings 17:20-21



Special Music: "Talking to God"

Chrissy Metz

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ik9KNB0F5sk>

INSIDE THE MIRACLE

A new day dawns
I step into the morning sun
Air warm against my skin
As I meet a palette of colors
Confectionary for the eyes
Songs and strings of nature playing in my ears
I gather the world in my arms
And I shout praises!

A new day dawns
I step into the morning sun
The warm air against my skin goes unnoticed.
I view a palette of flavorless colors
More like graffiti than candy
Nature's strings offering discordance to my ears
As I lean against the world
And with a shy voice, say hey!

A new day dawns
I step outside my door
And hardly notice the morning sun
I feel no warmth
Creation marked with pastels and faded dyes
Make the world a less magical place
Radio noise abuzz in my ears
I push the world away

And whisper nothing in particular.

A new days dawns

I don't bother to open my door

It's just another wearisome day

I feel no air

Shades of uninspired gray

Hide any possibility of wonder

No buzz within my ear

I walk away from this weary world

Saying nothing,

Because there is nothing to say.

If the new day dawns

Then when did the world change?

When did the warmth fade?

Where did the colors go?

What happened to nature's song?

Is there nothing here to keep me warm?

My joy is stifled in my throat.

Only then did I come to realize

The warmth never left

The colors never faded into grays

Nature's voice never died

Creation remains unchanged

It is I who have changed

It is I who have lost my passion.

**I have allowed the miracle
To grow stale in my soul
And only I
Can change my perspective
To once again appreciate
The miracle of Creation
And the wonder it brings
To the depth of my being
A gift from God to my spirit.**

**A new day dawns
Sun scatters shadow
Bringing forth the spectrum of Creation
Give thanks, oh my soul,
For the gift of sunlight
And nature's song
Create in me a clean heart, oh God.**

I remember a time about ten years ago, when north Texas was flush with water. Spring rains had filled up the lakes and reservoirs. The rivers were rushing. Stock ponds were full. You could drive around any lake and find a plethora of fishing boats and pleasure craft. Lake lots were in high demand. People who were fairly well off would look at those lots and envision beautiful homes, personal docks, and recreational boats. Because of the overabundance of water, the plethora of activities, and the high demand, the lots were expensive. Building houses on these was expensive. Maintaining the boats was expensive.

It not only looked like an idealistic kind of life, but buying one of these lots also looked like great investment for the future. People flocked to the real estate, many spending money they didn't have knowing that they would be able to make that money back in spades because those lake lots were always going to be in demand.

And then... well, the rains stopped. And there was a tremendous draught in North Texas, an area where there is generally plenty of water. Hard decisions had to be made to ensure that people had water for every-day life. Water was re-routed. Restrictions were put in place. Lakes began to dry up. And those sure-thing investments took a nose dive. You could drive around those streets with lake lots and see fancy houses boarded up. You could look out over the lake and see those pleasure craft embedded in the mud 100 to 200 feet from the new shoreline, which continued to recede. Suddenly, people were unable to give those lots away. What had seemed like a sure investment, became an albatross around those who had invested.

Eventually, the rains returned things began to return to normal. A great number of people learned some very hard lessons. But the biggest lesson that everyone learned is that it is foolish to assume that one will always have the blessings that surrounds them. Things change. When we forget that we are living inside the miracle, our perspective becomes skewed. We forget about the source of our blessings and those blessings become expectations. Those investors were so busy enjoying their lake lots that they never saw the change coming.

There is an Old Testament example of this. We know the story of how God provided the Israelites with Manna and Water in the wilderness. But in the 12th chapter of Numbers, we read how the Israelites start to complain about eating manna every day. They start talking about all the good food they had when they were in Egypt. Talk about a short attention span. Moses was angry. The Bible tells us that God was angry. But the Israelites kept complaining saying that they wanted meat. And God sends them quail even though he tells them that it isn't a good thing. Well, the people are overjoyed as the quail fly close to the ground and everyone is running around grabbing them as fast as they can. Then they gorge themselves on the quail. They gorge themselves until it makes them sick. And once that happens, the manna suddenly seems to be okay since they never got sick on the manna.

When we live inside the miracle and stop seeing it as the miracle that it is, we become disgruntled. The Bible tells us that we are a stiff-necked people. We seem to prefer to learn our lessons the hard way.

Just like last week, I would like to read you the entire story surrounding our scripture today in order to keep everything in context. 1 Kings 17: 17-24:

Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?”

“Give me your son,” Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the LORD, “LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?” Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the LORD, “LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him!”

The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, “Look, your son is alive!”

Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.”

This story is a continuation of our story from last week, where we learned about the widow in Zarephath and how God established a relationship between her and Elijah. The story last week talked about the miracle of the flour and oil; how God promised that the flour and oil would not run out until the rains came. There would be “More Than Enough” for Elijah, the widow, and her family throughout the season of draught.

This story that we are looking at today is extremely important when we view it from a single miracle standpoint. The boy dies. Elijah prays for the boy's life to be restored. God returns life to the boy. The woman is grateful. And that truly is a wonderful story, a story of God hearing Elijah's prayer and bringing forth a miracle. It would be easy enough to simply say "We Speak, God Listens", God answer prayer, God hears us. Amen.

But there is so much more going on here contextually when we connect this story to the previous story. God has already performed a miracle in this woman's life. How easy it is to forget that. She has a jug of oil and a jar of flour that never seems to run out. I'm sure that she was grateful for that... until it became routine. Until it became more of an expectation than a daily miracle. There should have remained wonder in going to that jar of flour and jug of oil every morning knowing the containers would still be full, that they would not run out not matter how much she used. But it seems that some of the miracle sparkle has dulled. She is living inside of the miracle and seems to have forgotten just how much of a miracle it is, just like the Israelites and the manna.

As our story goes, her son gets sick. Every day he keeps getting sicker. And finally, he gets so sick his breathing stops and he dies. We need to take notice of the fact that she doesn't ask for Elijah's help while her son is sick. She waits until he dies. And even then, she doesn't ask for help. She just blames Elijah. **She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"**

She still sees him as a man of God, the one who called upon God to help her in her struggles due to the draught. But one thing to note about this woman is her fierce independence. She didn't ask God or Elijah for help when she was at the end of her rope and was gathering sticks to make her last meal. Elijah didn't expect her to. But Elijah stepped in, just as God had instructed him, and God created the miracle of the flour and oil. That was not an insignificant event.

But now, there is this sense that the woman never really accepted the miracle as a miracle, or maybe just became complacent with it. It's almost as if things have been going so good, the other shoe just has to drop.

I think we have all had those moments in life where things are toodling along and life just seems too good to be true. So much so that we begin to expect something bad to happen, just to balance things out. We even go so far as to sabotage ourselves or our relationship with our Creator thinking that we don't deserve the wonderful life we are living, that it is all just too good.

That can happen when we forget that we are living inside of the miracle. Suddenly, we start craving things outside of the miracle, things that aren't any good for us. And sometimes we start to believe that we lead a charmed life, and nothing can go wrong, that we are invulnerable. Hey, we have a lake lot. When that happens, we often stop talking to God and just expect God to protect us no matter how we treat Him, no matter if we just stop talking to Him. When that happens and we get blindsided by adverse events, it suddenly seems appropriate to strike up a conversation with God who has been standing beside us trying to get our attention.

“How could you do this to me, God? How could you let me get comfortable inside of my miracle and then whip the rug out from under me? I know I have pretty much been ignoring you lately, but I’m talking to you now! How could you do this to me?”

What does it take for us to realize how truly blessed we are so that the first words out of our mouth in the morning are, “Thank you, God?” That we acknowledge that we are living inside the miracle of salvation and grace and we should never forget to be grateful?

Elijah hasn’t forgotten. He knows that he is living inside of the miracle and is grateful for the relationship that he has with his Creator. Still, he has to be taken a little aback when the widow accuses him by saying, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?” He probably thought that question came to him right out of left field. He has been living with this woman and her son for some time, so it had to have hit him horribly hard to see her in such pain and her thinking that it was his fault.

But Elijah knows what to do. He hasn’t forgotten the miracle that surrounds him. He steps into that pain by asking for the woman’s son. And he takes the matter before God. I want you to notice what Elijah says to God. “LORD my God, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?” This is not a statement. It is a question. He isn’t blaming God. This is his way of asking God if there is something more going on here that what he sees, more than what he knows about. “God, is this a punishment? Or did the boy just get sick and die? Or is there a greater purpose here? Lessons to be learned?” In some ways, Elijah appears to be just as confused at the widow. But at least Elijah knows who to take the problem to.

Elijah lays down on the boy three times before he asks God to bring him back with the words, “LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him!”

There is a process and humility to this prayer. First, Elijah states that God is, in fact, God. That God is capable. That God is worthy of the name “God.” In other words, “Because you are God, I know that you can do this.” Only after acknowledging God as the Supreme Being does Elijah ask that the boy’s life return to him.

And God listened. The scripture says, **“The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived.”** The lord heard Elijah’s cry. We speak, God listens. Even when we are already standing inside of a miracle. It isn’t God that stops the conversation. We speak, God listens. He hears us.

Sometimes God says “No” in order to protect us from ourselves. Sometimes God says “Yes.” Either way, God listens to our prayers and acknowledges our voices. He knows our needs before we even bring them up. God knew that the widow’s boy had died. God also knew that she had become complacent enough within the miracle, that she accepted the miracle as a normal way of life. She had stopped seeing the miracle for what it was. God knew that this experience with the death of her son would refocus her attention back to seeing the miracles around her.

Then the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth.” It is clear here that the woman has forgotten about the salvation that came from the flour and oil. She had forgotten God’s intervention. She had forgotten God’s provision. She had even begun to question whether or not Elijah was a man of God. God used this incident with her son to remind her of all these things.

But the question begs to be asked, why do we forget what God has done for us in between the miracle moments? We need to understand that God is ready to hear us at all times, not just in the obvious times of need.

Paul tells us this: “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

This is not something that happens automatically. We have to teach ourselves to do this. We have to intentionally create space in our lives that allows for us to be in constant conversation with God; to be constantly open to the intervention of the spirit in all that we do. By creating that space and embracing the constant conversation, living that kind of life becomes habit and not something that we force ourselves to do.

We speak, God listens. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if that conversation that we have with our Creator, was simply due to the knowledge that Jesus walks by our side and is always listening to what we have to say? But the truth is, we like to run ahead, get distracted by what is happening around us, or fall behind because we want to revisit something in our past. We, just like the Israelites, are a stiff-necked people. We fall into the trap of being comfortable and forget about how good we have it. We stop thanking God for the little things and we only return to the conversation if it is about something that is important to us. We don’t even stop to think about, “What is important to God?” We tend to make the conversation about what we need from God rather than what God needs from us. We forget that it takes two in order to have a conversation.

Here is something that I would like for us all to try this week. When we first wake up in the morning, acknowledge our Creator as our Creator, then thank God for the day that is unfolding before us. Thank God for the blessings in our life. Thank God for the people around us. Let’s start our day by thanking God for making the day possible. Let’s do it every day. Let’s make it a habit. Let’s make greeting the day with a conversation surrounded by gratitude, the norm in our lives rather than the exception.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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