

Honey From The Rocks  
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August 13, 2017

**Psalm 81:1, 10-16** (NRSV)

Sing aloud to God our strength;  
shout for joy to the God of Jacob.  
I am the Lord your God,  
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.  
Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.  
"But my people did not listen to my voice;  
Israel would not submit to me.  
So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,  
to follow their own counsels.  
O that my people would listen to me,  
that Israel would walk in my ways!  
Then I would quickly subdue their enemies,  
and turn my hand against their foes.  
Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him,  
and their doom would last forever.  
I would feed you with the finest of the wheat,  
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

Have you ever had an "ah-ha" moment?

I want to be honest with you; I sometimes struggle with "religion"  
I love Jesus but religious folks can sometimes drive me crazy

The actions yesterday in Charlottesville, Virginia by people (many of whom) say that they love Jesus but act with hatred toward others can sometimes put a wall between me and Jesus.

I unfortunately --- sometimes let them do that too me

Because of that, I unfortunately have become a little jaded toward "religious folks" --- please see the quotation marks when I say "religious folks" --- I know that I am stereotyping --- I own that

When somebody says something like "Jesus loves you" --- my eyes **can** begin to roll

But something happened --- Matt's sermon last week made me really reflect on looking in the mirror

And because of that ---  
I decided I wasn't going to let the "religious" folks do that too me anymore.

But the initial ah-ha moment happened a few years ago  
I am slow to learn and need reminders like Matt gave us

Nancy and I were running a half marathon with the catchy name:

WINE 13.1, in southwest Michigan  
As I was running along --- at about mile 8 --- which was the hilliest section of the course, I had just completed a second steep and long hill and there it was ---- an innocuous sign in somebody's yard.

There had been numerous signs along the way  
Run Forest Run  
Worst Parade ever  
Remember, you paid for this  
There is Wine at the end of the race  
But this one said quite simply:  
Jesus Loves You

My "normal" reaction would have been to roll my eyes and kind of say to myself "yeah right" or "whatever"

But this time was different

This time I said to myself --- THANK YOU --- I KNOW YOU LOVE ME!

For me it was a profound moment --- because I clearly heard God speak to me through that little sign

Ever had honey from a rock?

I imagine that it is kind of like getting blood from a turnip

Yet our scripture this morning says that it is something that can REALLY happen!

"With honey from the rock" God says "I would satisfy you."

To find honey --- one of the best things that experts say to do is to listen for the buzz of the honey bee and let them lead you to the hive

But that is not the kind of honey that this Psalm is talking about

The phrase --- HONEY FROM THE ROCK sounds ridiculous ----

But according to orkin.com bees do indeed make hives in rock crevices along with hollow trees and under the eaves of your roof

In John Gill's Exposition of the Old and New Testament he points out that:

"The land of Canaan abounded with hills and rocks in which bees had their hives, and from whence honey dropped to lower places; hence the land is said to flow with milk and honey ...."

But the phrase, as it is used here in verse 16, does not refer to actual honey from a bee, but rather to God's deliverance from times of trouble.

In verse 11, God says,

"But my people did not listen to my voice ...,"

and in verse 13, God laments,

"O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!"

In verse 16, God tells how listening would benefit them:

"... with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

The question that this verse begs of us is:

**DO WE ACTUALLY LISTEN FOR OR TO GOD?**

Before we rush off and answer that question we need to make sure we understand a couple of things about what this verse is saying.

First, the Hebrew word rendered here as "listen" — *shama* — means "to hear intelligently", but there is an interesting nuance to this "intelligent listening" --- for the word often implies not just attention but also obedience.

The King James Version of the Bible often translated *shama* as "hearken," which seems to tie together both the hearing-God meaning and the obeying-God meaning rather nicely.

Yet, while *hearing* and *obeying* are connected, they are also very different things.

Any of you who have ever had teenagers know that.

Our teenagers often hear us --- but they are not always obedient to what they are hearing.

So the real question for us is not do we listen for God but rather: do we **hearken** to God?

I want to take a moment this morning and have us look at the two different ways that we can LISTEN to God.

Most of us want to hear from God . . . I want to hear from God.

The problem is ---- it seems sometimes that God is difficult to be heard

There is a term that was coined by the mystic poet known as Saint John of the Cross in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He wrote a poem in which he described a time in which he did not sense God's presence --- a time in which God seemed distant or far away ---- He called it THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

We actively --- even intently listen for God --- yet we hear NOTHING

The interesting thing about this Psalm is that it speaks as if God's messages are readily available -- if we would only truly listen.

One of the problems is that we want a personal message from God --- and sometimes we get that.

Sometimes God does speak directly to us

I can think of a couple of times in my life where I very clearly heard God call to me

But more often than not, God speaks to us what I would call: generally or corporately.

Think about what can happen when you read a passage of Scripture or hear a sermon.

We can just let those words roll over us without trying to glean anything from them ---- or we can put some energy into trying to find ourselves in them.

If I am preaching on the Parables, for example ----

*You might ask yourself which character in the story you most identify with.*

If the parable is the Good Samaritan, who do you connect with most?  
the victim,  
the people who passed by the victim without helping,  
the Samaritan who did help him  
or even the innkeeper where the Samaritan took the victim?

By the way ---- There's also a donkey in that story, although that might be too much of a stretch.

Or if the Scripture is from an expository passage, such as an excerpt from Philippians,  
Can you put yourself in the audience to whom it was addressed, ---- but in a modern context.

While I may not be a convert from a pagan religion to Christianity, struggling to learn what it is all about, as were some in the Philippian church --- The truth is --- I sometimes live as though the Christian faith I grew up with was some unknown thing and act as though I were a pagan.

So how does Paul's admonition to let my mind dwell on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable and worthy of praise — and then to do those things (Philippians 4:4-8) — apply to me?

One of my goals every time I get up here to preach to you is to get you to ask yourself a simple question ----- WHAT IS THE SERMON ASKING ME TO DO?

Before I finish writing a sermon, I ask myself --- SO WHAT, so what if I preach this . . .

If you can answer the ---- What is this sermon asking me to do question --- then I would suggest that you have heard something from God.

*Shama* means in part, "to hear *intelligently*."

Putting ourselves into a parable or Bible story or engaging in some post-sermon: What is this sermon asking me to do? --- is, in fact, I believe, a way of hearing intelligently

I don't know --- maybe we conclude we haven't heard from God because we think it can't be that easy, and that it can't really be from God unless we've also *felt* something.

But I am convinced that God speaks to us through many different avenues.

That sign on the race course (And Matt's call to look in the mirror) --- I believe --- was God speaking to me

Unfortunately, there is also that second part of "hearken," **the obeying part**.

Most of us would prefer to just skip over this part.

Now I have no idea how hard the ancient Israelites worked at hearing God ---- what I do know is that the Hebrew Bible is filled with stories about their ongoing failure to obey God.

And that's not that hard to understand --- is it?

Many of us today have an instinctive resistance to obedience.

We are "self-made" people who value our free will.

But the reality is that we have true freedom only insofar as we act within the confines of our highest values.

The place most of us first learned about obedience was at home as children, where we initially were given no choice but to do the will of our parents.

Gradually, as we matured, we were granted more freedom, but our parents hoped that they had succeeded in implanting some of their values in us that would serve as both guides for and moderators on our freedom.

Once we became adults, we had to decide which values we would carry over from our parents and which would be supplanted by other values.

But whatever we ended up with, we essentially took the role once filled by our parents, and, in that sense, we relate to our values as something to obey, ---though we probably don't use that terminology.

While we are called to be obedient, our free will still remains in force, **we choose** to whom we will be voluntarily obedient to --- God or some other ideology (or maybe even just ourselves)

Being a part of the family of God implies:

That I recognize God as my parent, and, as his adult son or daughter, I choose to draw my values from God and allow those values to guide me.

In other words --- We **CHOOSE** if we will be obedient to God or not

Choosing to be son or daughter to **no one**, however, explains the Israelites' problem.

As the author of Psalm 81, speaking for God, put it,

"But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me."

And thus the Lord said,

"So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels"

In other words, "Okay, do it your way. Be your own authority."

But the implication is that the result will be far from satisfying.

God, of course, invites us to join God's family, and live like the children of God — grown children, mind you, because this is not a call to childishness.

It is a call to reflect the values of the family and of our creator parent.

Call it *shama*? — or call it listening to God — or call it obedience — or call it hearkening ... whatever word works best for you.

But the result is having access to and being satisfied by the sweet honey that comes from the rock that is the Lord.

I believe we are at a watershed moment in our lives as Christians.

Charlottesville has changed everything

And if it hasn't --- maybe you need to ask yourself: WHY NOT?

Jesus calls us to be a people that Love God and Love Others ---

and only when we learn to do that ---

only when we are obedient to God's call and character in our lives and in our daily actions ---

can we experience that sweet honey that flows from the Rock of Jesus.

So tell me ---- What's this sermon asking you to do?