



ST. MATTHEWS
Experience God's Family

Sermon Title: **Guidance - part 1**

Sermon Date: **11 September 2011**

Preacher: **Colin Retief**

Guidance: Listening to God's voice, and doing God's will.

We're going to be looking at the issue of Guidance. Guidance is what we follow in order to make decisions as we travel through life.

About 10 years ago, I was working in Joburg, in a suburb called Blairgowrie, and our youth group was invited to youth rally in Hillbrow. So we set off from Blairgowrie that Friday evening, one of the parents had lent us their vw microbus for the evening. Let's just say that we found our way to Hillbrow, but once we were in Hillbrow, we got a bit lost.

It was dark at this point, there were people on the side of the road who were making fires, I didn't have a clue where we were. We somehow ended going up the wrong way in a one way. Luckily I managed to get hold of Ajith, who was the guy who was hosting the youth rally, and I gave him the road name and he directed me out of there to the place where the youth rally was being held.

I needed some guidance. I couldn't just rely on my own ability to somehow sense which was the right way to go. I don't have a built in GPS system.

Well, it's the same in life. We don't naturally make the right decisions or make the good decisions.

And we're all guided by something. We've all got something that we let determine the decisions that we make. So if you're looking for a new car, you'll go and do some research to be guided as to what is the best car to get. In that case, your guide may be google, or some car finding website.

Or if it's time for your contract to be renewed on your cellphone, and you're looking for a new cellphone, there are some great websites that you can go to that compare the different phones, and that can really help you as you make your decisions.

And I suppose when it comes to choosing things like new cars and cellphones, and even houses, there are enough practical ways to seek guidance on those issues. I don't need to deal with those types of things here in this talk.

But what about when it starts getting a little bit more difficult. Decisions like, what career do I choose? I suppose there are career counsellors to help with that kind of thing. But it is a little more difficult than just choosing a car. What about choosing a wife? There's no website to help you do that? There are some issues where we need guidance, but there is nowhere to go for clear answers.

Don't you sometimes wish that you could just look up in the sky and that God would somehow just write something in the clouds or something like that, just so that you could know that he's told you what you need to do? Or that God would just send you a sign of some sort. Just so that you could know that what you're doing is what God wants you to do.

Because here's our dilemma as Christians. We live in a world where guidance is offered from many different quarters. And the reality is, is that people choose the most convenient forms of guidance. There are many voices out there guiding us, and there is one voice that we should be listening to and so we get confused.

So the starting point for the Christian who wants to be guided by God, is that he or she needs to learn to listen to God's voice.

Have you ever watched a group of mothers sitting having a chat while their toddlers are playing in the room next door. And then suddenly there's a little cry coming from the room next door where the kids are playing. Who's the first mother to get up? It's the mother of the child who is crying. They know their child's voice. They're tuned to the voices of their child.

We need to somehow be tuned into the voice of God. so that we can recognize his voice and hear it, amidst all of the other voices that are crying out to guide us. And that is our starting point for guidance as Christian. Being able to hear and recognize God's voice.

Historically God's people have been led by God's voice

If we had to read through the Bible tonight and take all the significant events when Great things happened and how they happened. And not just the great things, the more simple things as well. They were all done as a result of listening to the voice of God.

Let's start at the very beginning. When God created his world and everything was good. In fact when the world was in it's pre-fallen state, God spoke to Adam and Eve.

Look at Genesis chapter 1:27 to 31.

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Do you see what's going on here? It's guidance. Here is the world, before Adam and Eve took that fruit that they shouldn't have taken, and ate it. But even in the pre fallen state, Man isn't born, just naturally knowing what to do. God still instructs them. We were created, even if we were perfect, to hear God's voice and obey it. In fact that was part of the problem, Adam and Eve feeling that they didn't need to listen to God's instruction, that they didn't need guidance from God.

But before the fall, here's God saying to them "Be fruitful, and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

But there it is, since day 1, or should I say day 6, God has been the guide. Listening to God's voice has been how we know what God wants us to do.

And we see through the rest of the Bible, we see God speaking to His people, giving them direction, giving them hope, telling them what they need to do. We see it Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, through the prophets. If you've been coming on Sunday mornings, you'll see that God even speaks through dreams on certain occasions.

Something that we need to take note of when God speaks and guides people when they hear his voice, is that God's instructions were always very clear. As far as I know, there aren't occasions where people receive a message from God in some way or another, and say, "mmm, maybe God is trying to tell us something".

God is very clear when his voice is heard.

So if the starting point for us, when it comes to guidance is hearing God's voice, how do we hear God's voice today?

How do we hear God's voice today?

This is quite a controversial topic, this whole topic of how do we hear God's voice today. There are people who have written books on "listening to God" and how to hear God's voice, and hearing the voice of God, and many of them with different opinions.

There is one particular author who claims to be a guru on listening to God and hearing God's voice. And he says that God spoke to him one night in a booming voice. He woke him up at some time during the night, told him to go to the book of Habakuk, and from there he received instruction on how to hear God's voice. And so from that experience, he has come out with the 4 keys to hearing God's voice. And he outlines those points on his website, but if you really want to find out more, you can purchase the dvd's or do the course at his online university at a cost.

So, in 2011, how do we hear God's voice.

Hebrews 1:1-4

¹ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways

If you look through the Old Testament, there are a number of ways that God has spoken. He spoke to Adam, Moses, the prophets, through dreams, through angels.

So in terms of the norm. In terms the way that God chose to speak to his people, that is how he chose to do it in the Old Testament. Through prophets at many times and in various ways. If someone comes to you claiming they heard God speak to them in an audible voice, as if it were the norm, they are claiming to have Old Testament Prophet status.

I'm not saying God can't do that today, I'm not saying God won't speak to people that way today, but we must be very careful and weary of people who claim to hear God's audible voice on a regular basis. That was how God chose to speak to his people in the Old Testament. Because he was pointing them to something great that was to come. So look at verse 2.

² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Can you see what's happening here? The work of the prophets had been done. God had spoken through them, so they could tell His people about Jesus. God spoke through the prophets to prepare them for the fulfilment of his kingdom which was Jesus coming to earth and dying and then rising again. That was the focus of the message of God, when he spoke to people through prophets and the like.

Even when he spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, it was about them going and fulfilling God's purposes. Everytime in the Old Testament, when God speaks in a supernatural way, it's about his purposes being fulfilled.

In Luke 14, Jesus tells a parable about a banquet. Where the servants go out and invite all these privileged people to a banquet, but they've all got excuses. I've got to feed the cat, and I'm washing my hair. Ok, not exactly those excuses, but they might as well have been.

In that parable, Jesus is talking about his privileged people who had the servants invite them to the banquet. In other words, Israel, had the prophets invite them to the banquet. To have that kind of prophecy after Jesus, is like sending out invitations to a banquet that has already happened.

Now don't get me wrong. God can and will work in whatever way he chooses. And if he chooses to use an audible voice for us to hear, so be it. But it's certainly not the norm. It's certainly not the way that he's told us that he will speak to us. So we certainly mustn't expect him to speak to us in that way.

So if God has spoken to us through Jesus in these last days, but Jesus has ascended into heaven, and isn't with us, how does God speak to us?

We have in our possession a book that contains everything we need to know about Jesus. It contains the writings of those prophets who pointed God's people to Jesus, who invited the guests according to the parable. It also contains the writings of those who spent time with Jesus. Who sat under the ministry of Jesus. It contains the writings of those who even died for Jesus.

This book, is everything God wants us to know about him. In this book is all that we need to know about him. It's in this book that we can know God's attributes and his character. It's in this book that we can know what God likes and what he doesn't like. What pleases him, and what grieves him.

Bob Pierce, the guy who founded World Vision, was quoted as saying, "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God".

The only way that you're going to know what breaks the heart of God is if you're steeped in the Bible.

When you hear the Bible being read, you are hearing God speak. His voice may sound like the person who is reading it, but it's God speaking.

So here we have a book that shows who God is, what God is all about. He is a Good God. He is holy, he is pure, he is Great and infinite. This book also shows us who we are, in the sense that it exposes us. It exposes our sin. Hebrews 4:12: *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

Thankfully this book also points us to Jesus. Because it's only because of Jesus that sinful man can relate to a holy and pure God.

So when it comes to guidance, we need to let this word be our guide. We need to become so tuned into this word, that when trouble comes, when difficult decisions come, the decisions will be made by a life that is saturated with God's word.

If the Bible doesn't excite you, and it should. You're going to look for other ways to hear from God, when the word that he has given you is right in front of you. He has given us everything we need for life and godliness.

I'm sure we'd all agree that Billy Graham has done some good work during his time. There are many people who have to come to know Christ through his ministry. And I think his ministry started in the 60's. He's always been a great example of faith to people. He's lived a godly life. He's made an effort to be above reproach. And in terms of guidance, if you look at his life, he made some good, godly decisions.

In 1977, in an interview with Christianity Today, he was quoted as saying: *One of my great regrets is that I have not studied enough. I wish I had studied more and preached less. People have pressured me into speaking to groups when I should have been studying and preparing. Donald Barnhouse said that if he knew the Lord was coming in three years, he would spend two of them studying and one preaching. I'm trying to make it up.*

This is Billy Graham saying that he hadn't spent enough time studying and getting into God's word. John Pollock who wrote the first Authorised Biography of Billy Graham describes his Bible reading habits.. This is the Bible reading habits of someone who felt they didn't study the Bible enough.

Every day he reads five Psalms, covering the psalter in a month, and one chapter of Proverbs, the book that "shows us how to relate our own lives to our fellow men." He reads through a Gospel each week, using commentaries and modern translations, and constantly returns to the Acts of the Apostles. He annotates throughout the Bible. He learns great stretches by heart...

All of this was saturated with prayer. "I have so many decisions to make each day, and so many problems, that I have to pray all the time" (Pollock, 248).

"Prayer and Bible reading, inextricably intertwined, are the tap roots of Billy Graham's character and of his message"

How do you see the Bible? What impact are you letting this book have on your life? Billy Graham knew that this book was how he was to hear from God. Billy Graham knew that if he was to make Godly decisions, he needed to be saturated by this book. Yet he still felt he didn't study it enough.

I want to challenge you tonight to take God's word seriously. To see the words that are on every page of this book, as the very words of God. I want to encourage you to study it, to memorize it, to pray over what you've read. God has given us his word, and we can talk to God about it.

If you want guidance from God, if you want help in the decisions that you have to make while travelling through life, get stuck in the word. Get back to the Bible.