

Voice Recognition

Voice recognition is almost *passee* now that we're on to facial recognition, but it's still amazing to me. However, I'm not interested in making you marvel at voice recognition, but you recognizing just what the Voice of God can do, has done, and still does.

The reality show *The Voice* is based on the premise that if you're really going by voice alone, than choose based on only hearing a singer's voice. A newer reality show is even closer to the first point I'm trying to make. It's called *I Can See Your Voice* and the premise is that you can tell a good singer without even hearing them sing, but it's still not quite the point. Think of a voice analysis machine or even that super old, I'm talking 1970s now, technology that showed you when a sound producing device was reaching the red end. Sound actually produced a visible image. You could see it doing something. That's the first point made by our text but English can't easily reproduce it.

After the angels tells her she is highly favored and that Yahweh is with her, we read, "Mary was greatly troubled at his words (*logos*)". Then when Gabriel explains how barren Elizabeth can bare in her old age he quotes the Lord's Word to barren Sara: "Nothing is impossible with God." Literally it's "not any word (*rhēma*) is impossible." When Mary presents herself as the Lord's slave she says, "May it be to me as you have said." Literally it's, "May it be to me according to your word (*rhēma*)." *Logos* lays stress on the thought expressed; *rhēma* stresses the fact that God Himself spoke (Lenski, *Hebrews*, 183). Luther said *rhēma* is something "done and spoken of" (*First 22 Psalms*, 219). *Rhēma* emphasizes the activity of the word. This led to it's use as a verb. Except in this special sense the word doesn't not seem to have been used in NT times. (Kittle, IV, 76). So when it's used in the NT, *rhēma* is referring to God's Word as active, powerful, doing what He says.

In the Psalms alone the Lord declares His *rhema* is: right/true absolutely (33:4); makes the heavens (33:6); is performed by angels (103:20); is a both a light and lamp; i.e. it shows where you stand and where you're going (119:105), and that the Lord remembers His *rhēma* to a 1,000 generations (105:8). There hasn't been a 1,000 generations since Adam and Eve. *Rhema* is first used in reference to the Promised Seed. Genesis 15:1 says, "The *rhema* of the Lord came to Abram in a vision" and spoke of the Promised Seed. The next time *rhema* is used it's the Lord speaking to Sara, the one to bear the Promise Seed, assuring her no *rhema* of God is impossible.

You know what Voice Active Technology is. "Hey" Google, Siri, Alexa and you're ready to start getting things done. God's voice blows our mind. Psalm 29 says, "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the Lord shakes the desert;...The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare" (4-9). When men raise their voices it can be unnerving. Psalm 46 says when the Lord raises His voice "the earth melts" (6). In the opening scene of Revelation the voice of the glorified, Jesus is described as "loud...like the sound of a trumpet" (1:10). Later in Revelation it's described as "the voice of many waters...the voice of a great thunder" (14:2). Google "Music Communications Close Encounters of the Third Kind." Watch the clip. Humans use tones to communicate with aliens. Their puny, shallow notes are answered by deep, heavy notes that blow things away.

That's the Voice of God to us. "No, it's not," is what some of you are thinking, and you have chapter and verse on this, don't you? 1 Kings 19:11-13, right? "The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" You know whose Voice this is? Yahweh's. You know who Yahweh is? "No one can say Jesus is Yahweh except by the power of the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12:3).

Until the Voice of God Almighty is inscripturated, or in-Breaded, and above all else incarnated, it is unapproachable, unbearable, un-hearable in many respects. You know there are sounds too low or high for humans to hear but animals do. The voice of the Holy God, apart from Jesus, is that to us. It sounds only like the adults in Charlie Brown shows; you know like waw-waw trumpets, or like the ocean surf, or a waterfall. But even before God's Word in time was written down and placed in Body-Bread and Blood-Wine, it was incarnated. Because while we can only see things chronologically in time and space, God sees all, all the time, and so before Him it's as Rev. 13:8 says: the Lamb was "slain from the foundation of the world" (YLT). In order to be slain for the sins of the world He was carrying on Him, Jesus had to take on flesh and blood. God in flesh and blood can be approached; God's Word written down is in

tones, sounds, and words humans can hear, read, and understand; God's incarnate Word joined to Bread and Wine for us and our salvation is labeled safe for human use, safe for human consumption.

But still there is a sense that as the Christmas carol goes, "Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy, 'Do you hear what I hear?/ Ringing through the sky, shepherd boy/ Do you hear what I hear?/ A song, a song high above the trees/ With a voice as big as the sea...'" This Christmas carol was written not about Christ but as "a plea for peace...during the Cuban Missile Crisis" of October 1962 (<https://www.songfacts.com/facts/bing-crosby/do-you-hear-what-i-hear>). But I like the thought of a voice as *big* as the sea not as *thunderous, stormy, or foreboding* as one. This is the Voice that pled guilty of all our sins before the Baptist baptized Him with the Waters of forgiveness; this is the Voice that always spoke the truth; the Voice that rebuked the Devil with Scripture; the Voice that would not defend Himself against scurrilous accusations, and so died forsaken and unheard by God and Man. But because He drank the cup of wrath His Father asked Him to, He was heard by Him when He prayed, "Father into Thy hands I commend my Spirit" (Lk. 23:46). Now this Voice says Hebrews. "Ever lives to make intercession for us" (7:25). More than that 1 John says, "If anybody does sin, we have One who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (2:1).

The Voice not only is our Intercessor but our Advocate. This was a joke in early 80s Texas when the legislator decided "no pass" in school met "no play" in sports. The joke goes the coach's star player failed his math exam and so was ineligible for the big game on Friday. The coach went to the math teacher *interceding* on behalf of the player. The teacher agreed to a retest. So, he set the player down and asked him, "What is 2 x 2?" The player replied, "4". At that, the coach jumps out of his chair and starts *advocating* for the player saying, "Give him another chance; give him another chance." We have a perfect Intercessor and Advocate, and He is on our side. Though everyone else, though the Devil, the World, and our Flesh most decidedly are not on our side, Jesus is, and His Voice is always speaking in our defense, for our benefit, for our salvation.

In the history of the world, even in the church, there is a falling off on one side or the other of the question of who Jesus is? Sometimes He is only God all the time and so is not Intercessor or Advocate on behalf of flesh and blood men. Other times He is only man all the time. Able, most certainly, to intercede and advocate for men because He is one. But the voice of a good man, even the best man, is still no more than the voice of a man. This is what people inside and outside the church think Jesus is today. He's a smart man, a wise man, a loving man, but after all he just a man as was the Buddha, Mohamed, and Confucius. The voice of a man isn't as big as the sea; the Voice of God incarnated in the Person of Jesus through the womb of a virgin named Mary is even bigger than the sea.

I hear here the second verse of "Be Still, My Soul." Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below." If the realm of nature still knows His voice, how much more the realm of the supernatural? The Voice, even in His state of humbleness can say, "Away from Me Satan!" and away he goes. How much more in His State of Exaltation must everything obey? Do you think men can bind what Jesus' voice does not? Or that men can loose what Jesus' voice binds? Do you think unbelief that God incarnate baptizes, forgives, and communicates Himself by the voice of a man, means He can't or doesn't?

Recognize the power of the voice of the Lord incarnated, in-scriptured, and in-Breaded in Communion. You can't rely on that Voice too much. You can't hope on the Voice in these too much. The Lord Jesus Himself says, "He who hears My pastors hears Me" (Lk. 10:16). To paraphrase what C.S. Lewis said about all Christianity: Important if true. Recognizing that the Voice of God Almighty sounds today in your ears through another flesh and blood man is important if true. If false, it's of no importance. The only thing it can't be is moderately important (*God in the Dock*).

But right here at the intersection of hope and doubt is where most try to live. Not Mary. She responds to Gabriel's quoting the Bible that every *rhema* from God is possible with the optative (Remember the optative from last week?), "May it be to me according to your *rhema*." She has no doubt that God's Word from the mouth of an angel would happen. She recognized the power of His Voice even in the mouth of a messenger. Do we? Amen

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