

# Hearing the Voice of God - Part 1

by Carter Conlon

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*To hear God's voice again, go back to the last place you knew He was and lay hold of Him, even if you don't understand.*

**Duration:** 53:14

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 29:11, Jeremiah 29:13-14, Matthew 6:33, John 20:11

**Topics:** "Voice Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of feeling distant from God and losing the desire to seek Him. He references the parable of the seed and explains how the cares and concerns of the world can choke the seed of God's promises, leading to unfruitfulness. The speaker reassures the audience that even in dry times, God has not forsaken them and is still present. He encourages them to cry out to God and long for the intimacy they once had with Him. The sermon also touches on the misconception of hyper-spirituality and emphasizes the importance of genuine repentance and seeking peace with God.

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## Transcript

This is one of the Times Square Church pulpit series. It was recorded in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in Manhattan, New York City. Other tapes are available by writing World Challenge, P.O. Box 260, Lindell, Texas 75771, or calling 903-963-8626.

None of these messages are copyrighted, and you are welcome to make copies for free distribution to friends. Tonight I'm going to be speaking about coming back to the voice of God, and it's primarily for those who will be sitting here that could say, I don't know how it happened, but I remember the day that I was so on fire for the Lord, and I don't know how I heard His voice, I just know I did. I was in the Word, and it wasn't like there was this audible voice coming from Heaven saying, Thus saith the Lord, take the bus and go to Minneapolis, that kind of thing.

That's hyper-spirituality, folks. Whenever you run into that, it's 95% of the time God's not in that kind of stuff. It's a strong leading as we begin to walk with Him.

Just walking down the street, and I've had this happen numerous times, just walking down the street, I remember one day walking just to church, we were very busy during the day, a young girl standing on this street corner here with a tin box, collecting money, and as we normally do in New York City, we just walk by much of this type of thing, and I walked by about 10-15 yards down the street, and this strong impulse,

this is the voice of God. It's because when we spend time with the Lord, God can get a hold of our hearts and begin to speak to us, and this strong leading of God just spoke to my heart and said, Stop and go back and give her something. I don't know the reasons why, and I actually even tried to walk through it.

Have you ever tried to walk through the voice of God? And the more you walk, the heavier your steps start getting until you finally say, Alright, alright, okay, I'll do that. So I turned around and I walked back to this young lady, who looked like she'd been in a fairly rough situation perhaps for a little while, and she had a box and she's collecting, and it said, I think, I don't remember the name, but I think it was the United Way or something like that on the box. You know, first of all, it's doubtful because it's New York, but secondly, I said, Who are you collecting for? And she said, The United Way.

And I said, Well, why are you collecting for the United Way? And she said, I'm trying to make peace with God. And I knew then, of course, why the Holy Spirit was speaking to my heart and saying, Go back. It wasn't about putting a dollar or two in the box.

Here's a young lady that, through collecting for charity, thinks she can atone for her sins. She'd had a fairly jaded past and a lot of rebellion, things like that, and when I began to open up to her the way to peace with God, it was like it was too much to even believe. She couldn't comprehend it.

She looked like she wanted to laugh and cry and shout and dance and fall to the ground all at the same time because she just simply couldn't comprehend it. But that is the voice of God. It's not this hyper-spirituality that sends people off to Timbuktu, walking into the church saying, Well, I'm here.

God sent me. Now look after me. And that happens here, folks.

People come from all over the country saying, I'm here. You know, I haven't got five cents in my pocket. Look after me now.

And it's such a tragedy when people think that that is the voice of God. That's not the voice of God. That's just presumption.

Coming back to the voice of God, John chapter 20, if you will. Coming back to the voice of God. Now, these messages are not going to be of any value if you really don't want to hear God's voice because God's voice will always ask something of us at times that we don't want to give.

God will lead us into places that we don't normally want to go. He'll begin to speak about things we don't want to hear because God is God. And when we give Him full reign and full rights, He'll begin to go into areas of our life and say, That's not nice.

That's not right. And if we want to hear the voice, then, of course, we're going to hear His voice through His word. That's where He always speaks to us.

He showed us that so clearly last night. Tonight I'm going to speak to people. You have a heart for God.

You wouldn't be fasting if you don't. And you're coming to the house of the Lord and you're saying, I somehow lost the fire that I had for God. I was walking with Him.

I was hearing Him. And I lost it. It's not what it used to be.

And I want this back. I don't know how to even put it into words. But I want the intimacy with Jesus that I used to know, that I seem to have lost.

And that's the message for tonight. And for tomorrow night, I'm going to take it to another level. And it's for those who can say, Pastor, I have been following God.

I have an intimacy with God. And I've been living for God. But the word tomorrow night for you is for those who that is their testimony, but God wants to take you to another level of Him.

He wants to take you to a deeper walk with Him. And that's what tomorrow night, part 2, is going to be about. John chapter 20.

Father, I thank You for the anointing of the Holy Spirit that always abides on Your Word. I thank You, Lord, that You will give me the ability to convey this to Your church tonight in a manner that will bring life. Lord, we're interested in life.

We're not interested in any religion. We want life. We want a living relationship with You.

God, I ask, Lord, that You lead us now through Your Word. Every time we go into Your Word, it's like a journey. And it's a journey into the life of Christ.

It's a journey into the heart of God. Lord, I've come to cherish this journey. I've come to long for it and yearn for it.

I don't want to read the Word just to appease what I think God should be saying. I want to hear what You are saying, Lord. And God, this is our heart tonight.

We want You to speak to us. And Holy Spirit, I come in absolute dependence on You. Lord, I dare not open this book.

I dare not try to expound the Scriptures from my own understanding. God, I ask You, Lord, to transcend my own frailty, the thoughts that would want to come from my own human heart, Lord. Transcend them and speak to us, God, Spirit to Spirit and heart to heart.

Let Your Word come alive tonight in the hearts of the hearers. And, oh God, I know that as You do, You will send Your Word to accomplish a purpose. You called us to fast because You want to speak to us.

You called us to seek You because You want to open to us truth that can set us free and bring us into a dimension of resurrection life that You long for us to have. God, we're in agreement with You tonight. We long to have it as well.

As a church, Lord, we want to be the people that You have called us to be. You set this church in New York City, right in this place, right on this corner, and for a purpose, and we want to know the purpose. And more than know it, God, we want the power and the desire to fulfill that purpose, Lord, that You have called us for at this time.

Give us the power to be Your bride and to be Your church. Lord, we thank You for this in the mighty name of Jesus. Hallelujah.

John chapter 20, verse 11. This is after Jesus was crucified and buried. Verse 11 says, But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain.

And they said unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back and saw Jesus standing and knew not that it was Jesus. And Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? Now she, supposing him to be the gardener, said unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

And Jesus said unto her, Mary. And she turned herself and said unto him, Rabboni, which is to say, Master. And Jesus said unto her, Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father.

But go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and to your Father and to my God and to your God. And Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had spoken these things unto her. Mary Magdalene.

The Scripture doesn't tell us necessarily what type of light that she had led, but we are informed in other passages of Scripture that she had been under considerable satanic oppression, that Jesus had come and set her free. She was among those that travelled in the company, who travelled with Christ for those three years that he was in his earthly ministry, ministering to his needs, hanging literally unto every word that he spoke. What an awesome day that must have been.

Can you imagine having been in her position? And yet, even though we are now in the year 2000, every one of us today has the opportunity to be in the same position that she was in. Set free, walking with Christ, literally hanging on every word that he speaks. His word is life.

It doesn't matter what the world has to say, because that all changes. It changes like the wind. But God has an eternal word.

The word that he spoke in Mary's ears is just as powerful, just as pure, just as plain. It has not changed in our generation. And I thank God for that.

How wonderful it must have been for those three years, to see the miracles, to be there perhaps when Lazarus was called out of the tomb, and begin to understand that not even death had power over this word that came from this man's mouth. Even he could command the dead that they would rise from the grave. How powerful it must have been to be among the company, to have been there, or to have first hand account of the time that he went to Jairus' house, and all the people are weeping and wailing, and saying that, don't even trouble the man, your daughter is dead.

To have Jesus walk in and say, she's not dead, she's only sleeping. To see the scorn of a society that's without supposedly knowing God, going to church and doing all the religious things, but don't know Him. And to hear the scorn and the ridicule of almighty God Himself, as He begins to speak an eternal word that promises life to everyone who will believe it.

To be in that position and to see Him go into the house, and the next thing that happens, they walk out together with Jairus' daughter. Hallelujah! Alive from the dead. And to see the people around saying, well, she was like dead.

No, she was dead. We know she was dead. We were in the house.

We saw it. She was dead. But then, through the word of the Son of God, she is alive.

To be there when Jesus took just a few loaves and some couple of fishes, from this young lad, and multiplied, just simply prayed to His Father, and to watch the food multiply, and to feed thousands upon thousands that had gathered to hear the word of God. How wonderful it must have been! The freedom, the miracles, day-to-day, moment-to-moment hope, that burned within Mary's heart, as she hung on to every word that came from the lips of Jesus. And folks, it's like that when you first come to the Lord, isn't it? Those that are brand new to Christ.

It's like that. For I remember those days quite well. Those first few days of knowing the Lord.

Those first few years. Every word. Every sermon.

Every time coming to the house of God. Weeping even when I didn't understand what was being spoken. But spirit to spirit, I knew it was life.

I knew it was truth. I knew it was what I had always longed for all my life. And a yearning in my heart to say, Oh, Jesus! I love You, Jesus! I want to walk with You.

I want to serve You. I don't have much to give You. But God, I give You what I have.

And God took it at face value, just like the couple of loaves and a few fishes, and multiplied it. And that's what God does in each one of our lives when we come to Him with a yearning heart. He takes the little that we have and multiplies it with His presence in our lives.

So that what we see and what is has no longer any resemblance to what was. I thank God for that. Just like in the book of Genesis, it says the earth was without form.

It was void. And darkness was on the face of the deep. That's what I was like when I came to Christ.

I think it's probably like what many of you were like when you came to Him too. Without form, that means having no substance really. Nothing of any lasting substance.

Without shape. And darkness was on your face. Have you ever, those that have come to Christ, have you ever looked back at some of those old photographs of what you used to think was cool a few years ago and what you thought was sharp and all the things that you used to do? And you look back and you say, how idiotic.

The songs you used to sing that you thought were so profound. I remember that when Teresa and I were in university together, there was this fellow called Cat Stevens. Some of you may remember him.

He wrote most of his songs in an insane asylum. And I remember we used to sing them, get out our guitars and sing all these songs and thought they were so profound. And then now, sometimes in my mind just rehearsing the words and say, what idiotic songs we were singing.

They don't even make any sense. And yet, here we are, supposedly in the higher institutions of learning thinking this is so profound. And it's just stupidity.

That's all it was. The ramblings of a man who's looking for a sense of stability himself. And then he just has the fortune, I guess, to publish it.

And everybody else who's looking for stability sings it and thinks this is just terrific. This is just wonderful. But I thank God for the day that I came to Jesus Christ.

Darkness was taken away. I'll tell you, I would never, well, I guess I could, but I wouldn't want to show you a picture of what I looked like before. Because it's not very nice.

It's kind of mean looking, as a matter of fact. But your whole countenance changes when you come to Christ. And this is what happened to Mary.

I think she's the one that says seven devils. Is that correct, Pastor Neal? Seven devils were cast out of her. And you imagine, set free, her whole countenance has changed.

Perhaps she was a prostitute. No matter what she was into, she was free and loved Jesus with all her heart and walked with Him for three years and hung on to every word. And all of a sudden, it seemed just in a moment, in a world, when it was gone.

And folks, it can happen to any one of us. We're walking with God and we love Him. We love His Word.

We love what He's doing. But something happens. And it seems as if we wake up one day and we walk through this valley, which was very short, and it just seems like He's gone.

And this cry came into her heart. Now in her circumstance, obviously, Jesus was crucified before her. I can't help but wonder what was going through her mind about all the promises, about the life, about the hope for her future.

And now she was watching it just die before her. And you know, the devil, when you go through these dry times, the devil would have you believe that God has forsaken you. The devil would have you believe that Jesus is a million miles away.

But I remind you, the devil is a liar. Jesus is a friend that sticks closer than a brother. He makes a commitment to you and I, and His commitment is just this.

I will never leave you or forsake you. I will not leave you. I am right there.

You might not see me for a season, and you might not understand me, but I'm still there. You see, Mary, I believe in my heart that there was a cry in her. Oh, just to hear His voice one more time.

Just to hear it the way it used to be. And I can see her now in John chapter 20, coming back to the area of the tomb. And I feel what the Lord gave me.

I wrote it down today because I felt it was something that could minister to all of us tonight. And it's just simply this thought. Mary knew in her heart that there was more hope in holding on to a dead Jesus who had given her life than a living world that had given her only death.

She was saying, well, it may not be like it used to be, and it may seem like He's a million miles away, and I may not understand what's going on, but I know there's more there. I'll go to the place where Jesus is dead, and I'll hold on to Him because there's more life there than anything the world has ever given. All the

world gave her was seven devils.

That's all she got from the world. And she said, I'd rather hang on to a dead Jesus. I'd rather hang on to a relationship that I can't even understand.

Folks, hold on when you go through trials. Hold on when you go through trouble. Hold on! God will be thankful to you.

Don't ever let the devil take away your faith. But then she runs into the question of how do I find Him? How do I find Him? And I believe that as we examine these Scriptures, it gives us the understanding of how can we hear His voice again. I think that she just, in her heart, there was a cry, oh, that I could just hear Him call my name again.

That I could just hear one word from Him. I loved Him so much, but it seems like He's so far. I don't understand what's happening around me.

It seems like the enemy is triumphant. But I'm making a determination in my heart. I'm going back to the last place that I know that He was.

And in that place, I'm going to lay hold of Him. Even if I don't understand, I'm going to lay hold of Him. Even if He's still dead, I'm going to lay hold of Him.

Now, we know today that Christ is not dead. He's risen from the dead. But I'm talking about Mary.

What was in her heart? More hope in a dead Christ than in a living world. And she went back to the tomb. And here are the steps that I believe the Holy Spirit has shown me for those who want to get back again to hearing the voice of God.

First of all, it says, but Mary in verse 11 stood without the sepulcher weeping. You see, in Jeremiah, put your marker there and go to Jeremiah chapter 29 with me please. Jeremiah chapter 29.

Please leave a marker in John 20. Jeremiah chapter 29 verse 10. Now, God's speaking to a people that for a season, because of their sin, because of their carelessness, had seemingly lost His presence.

But in reality, they hadn't. They had lost the ever-present blessing of Christ being in their midst and working with the fullness of His power as He had determined and always desired to do among His people. But yet He was still with them.

His plans, His purposes had not stopped for their lives. In verse 10 He says, For thus saith the Lord, Jeremiah 29.10, that after 70 years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word towards you in causing you to return to this place. God's saying this to you tonight.

No matter what kind of a trial you're going through right now, if you have lost touch with God, if you are willing to open your heart, God says, I'm going to bring you back. I'm going to bring you right back into the center of My will. I'm going to bring you right back into the center of the blessing that I have decreed for your life.

For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, verse 11 says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end. In other words, to give you that which you desire and to give you that which I have destined for your life. Then you shall call upon Me and you shall go and pray to Me and I will hearken

unto you.

Now here's the key. You shall seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. With all your heart.

In verse 14 He says, I will be found of you, saith the Lord, and I will turn away your captivity. I will gather you from all nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you again into the place once I caused you to be carried away captive. Mary, in verse 11 of John chapter 20, the scripture says, stood without the sepulcher weeping.

Number one, if we want to hear the voice of God, we have to recognize the need. We have to first recognize that there's a need in our heart. If we are content with present death and only memories of past life.

Now hear me. If we're content with present death and only memories of past life, then we might hear a voice and a leading which most often will be coming to us from our own hearts and that voice will pretend that it's God. You need to hear this.

We need to understand that there is a need. We need to recognize the need. I used to travel as a revivalist in churches across Canada that were wanting a resurgence of old time religion, as they would say.

And yet they wanted the old time religion but they didn't want the old time relationship. Here are people who are entrenched in religion, entrenched in certain ways of doing things. They had drawn a line and said, this is as far as we're going to go.

God calls us to Jerusalem. We're going to stop in Bethel or Dan. Just like the day of Jeroboam's altar.

When he built those two altars at both sides of what became the northern kingdom or Israel. And he said, I fear that the people are going to go back to Jeroboam. So he built an altar in Bethel on one side and Dan at the other.

And he said to Israel, this is as far as you need to go. And many, many people today have set up those altars and they say, God, this is as far as I need to go. This is the limit of my service.

And send us a preacher now and revive us. And so they want a preacher to come into the house of God. They want to feel good.

They want the old time feeling. But they don't want the old time relationship. They don't want to come back to the first day, that first love that says, Jesus, I'll go anywhere you want me to go.

God will do anything, you speak to me. They don't want to come back to the place of going to the prayer closet and seeking the face of God and seeking the will of God. They don't want to go into the Word of God and search for truth that can set them free with all of their heart.

And they just want a good old time feeling. And that's the tragedy of much of the modern church today. That's exactly what they want without the original relationship with God.

And subsequently it's opened the door and it's opened the hearts to all kinds of false prophets coming into the house of God who the Scripture says prophesy out of their own hearts. They can't prophesy from the Word of God because they're cut off from the Word of God. They don't understand the Word of God.

They can't possibly preach it. So all they can do is bring visions and feelings of their own heart. And the people themselves who are content with present death and the only memories of their past life who don't see their own need are just literally sitting ducks for these kind of ministries.

They are brought into this illusion of revival and that's all it is. It's just an illusion. There's no tangible reality to it.

It's not based in truth. It's not based in relationship. It's not coming to the place of saying, God, whatever you speak to me, I will consider no cost too great to live for you.

I will serve you. God, whatever you want to speak to in my heart, I invite you to speak. Whatever you want to change, I invite you to change.

There's only one voice, really, that leads us to eternal life. When we don't want that voice, there are many other voices that will masquerade as the voice of God. She recognized the need.

And that's simply my first question to you tonight and to my own heart. I'm preaching to myself tonight. There are many here that may benefit from this, but I feel first and foremost that I'm preaching to my own heart and also to your heart.

Do we recognize the need? Are we among those that say, well, this is, oh man, this is great. We're in Times Square Church. This is the Mount of Transfiguration.

I mean, let's build a tent here. Let's build one for Warren. Let's build one for Pastor Patrick and the choir.

Let's build one for this section and that section. And let's just stay right here until the day that Jesus comes and takes us home. Do we recognize the need to move deeper in God? Do we recognize the need that all of what's been given to us is for a purpose? It's not just to feel good.

Because if that's the only place we're willing to take it to, then eventually, we would end up being a church whose victories are all yesterday. Because the relationship that God has with His church is an ongoing, everyday living relationship. It is a constant word that He continuously speaks to the hearts of those who are open to His word.

Mary recognized the need. That's what took her to the tomb. I need Jesus.

I need His word. I need His light. I need His direction.

I need His strength. I have nothing without Him. What am I going to do? Go back to the world? What is the world going to do? Fill me full of demons again? This is Mary speaking in our heart.

There's nothing there. So she went to the graveyard. I'd rather live in the graveyard.

Really, that's what's in her heart with Jesus. Because this is my only hope. There was a need.

I need Him. I need Him. And then the Bible says she stooped down and looked into the sepulcher.

She stooped down. I always find it interesting that the entrance to the tomb was so low that the crowd couldn't get in. You'd literally hit your forehead on the door frame.

You had to stoop down to get into that place. You see, that was designed by God. That's not a coincidence.

Those who wanted to go deeper in God had to bow down. It possibly was so low that you had to go through it on your knees to get through the door. James 4.10 says, Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.

She stooped down and looked into the sepulcher. In other words, she humbled herself and looked into the place of death. Now, I really need you to hear this.

James 4.8 says, Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. She stooped down and looked into a place or the place of death.

This is what a tomb is all about. It's a place of death. And it speaks to me about the need to look into our own hearts, the deadness of our own hearts.

If I have lost touch with God, it's because some form of death has found a lodging place in my heart. Something that's not of God has come into my life and it may even have wrapped itself in wonderful religious robes. But it's come into my life and it's become part of my heart and the death, this working of death that's found a lodging in me has cut me off from the voice of God.

So there needs to be a humility. There's nothing more deadly than religious pride. Some of the hardest people to reach in the house of God are those that have been saved 20, 30, 40, 50 years.

They're the hardest to reach because there's an entrenched pride that comes into the life. But Mary was not there. She said, I've somehow lost touch with God.

I'm not hearing the voice of Jesus. She stooped down and looked into the place of death. And that is the pathway, if we can hear it tonight, to hearing the voice of God again.

To say, Lordy, if I'm not hearing You, if I'm not hungry for You, if I'm not thirsty for You, if I have no desire to seek You like I used to, then that means that something of death has found a lodging in my heart. And I've got to humble myself before God and begin to look into, by the power of the Holy Ghost, this deadness of my heart. Jeremiah said it this way, The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Who can know it? But then he answers his own question in the next verse, in verse 10, in Jeremiah 17, he says, I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings. Proverbs 14, 12 says, There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. The moment we leave off the seeking of God, the moment we're no longer hearing Him and desiring Him to lead us, our own heart begins to take over.

Our own heart begins to define its own scope of religion. Our own heart begins to say, Well, you don't have to go all the way to Jerusalem. You don't have to fast.

You don't have to pray. You don't have to seek God in His Word. Our own heart begins to define our level of service.

And our own heart begins to look around and see who's doing less than us. And when we've found a sufficient number of people doing less than us, then we start to feel pretty good about ourselves. We feel, Well, I'm doing more than them.

And if they're going to heaven, well, obviously I'm going. And that becomes our whole level of service. Because we begin to walk in a way that seems right.

But the Bible says the ends thereof are the ways of death. Now, it doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to go to hell. It just means that death instead of life is beginning to reign in the heart.

There are so many people that are going to stand one day before the throne of Christ. And only in that they understand that they so far felt short of what God had for their lives had they chosen to seek Him and to yield to Him and to begin to walk with Him and to begin to serve Him. So many people's lives could have been touched.

So much good could have been done if there had been a yielding in the heart. Then she said these incredible words. In 20, verse 12, it says, And she saw two angels in white sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

And they said unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? And she said unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him. Now the they is an interesting thing. This is the next step.

Confession and admission. They took away my Lord. Now I want to ask you a simple question tonight.

What are the they's in your heart? What are these things that got into your heart and took your Lord away and put Him in a place where you can say, I don't know where He is anymore. I read the Bible and it seems like it's a dead letter to me. I can't even pray.

I can go at best five minutes and then I'm on. I don't have a desire to fast. I don't have a desire to seek God and I haven't heard His voice in a long, long time.

I do remember the way it used to be but it's not that way anymore. So the question simply is, what are the they's? What are the they's? The Bible says that there was seed that was sown in certain ground and there were cares and concerns of the world came in and choked the seed and it became unfruitful. Are the they's an embracing, a giving place to the cares and concerns of this world, this life, and a putting away of the promises of God so that the cares and concerns are taking preeminence? This is the end of side one.

You may now turn the tape over to side two. And the voice now that you're hearing is voices of doubt and a voice of fear and a voice of unbelief. Where's the strength going to come from to get through this? Will my son or daughter ever serve God? Will this happen? Will that happen? And all of a sudden the voice of Jesus is just this little wee voice if at all way in the background and doubt and unbelief has the center stage as it is.

And perhaps if that's the case tonight that you, like Mary, can say, they have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have laid Him. In other words, He's gone. I don't know where He is.

Is it the deceitfulness of riches? Plans and ambitions? Personal plans and ambitions taking away your Lord? Taking away the voice of God? Folks, listen. If there is one thing that is incompatible with being a Christian, it's personal plan and ambition. It is just simply not compatible with being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

When we come to Christ He gives us new plans. He gives us new ambitions. The Bible says if we delight ourselves in the Lord that He will give us the desires of our heart.

I've often seen that. A lot of people say, well, seek God and He will give you the desires that are already in your heart. I don't believe that's what the Scripture is saying.

I believe it says if you delight yourself in the Lord He will give you the desires of your heart. He will give you brand new desires if we're delighting in Him. His desires will begin to be formed in us and then He will fulfill those desires.

Plans and ambitions. How many churches have been ruined with a ministry that has a secondary agenda? How many ladder climbers have found their way into the house of God working the political system to find some place of position and prestige among people? Ruining the house of God literally because there's no possible way that they can preach the heart of Christ with unfulfilled ambitions still in their heart. Folks, the best thing you can ever pray for the pastors in this house is God killed them.

Make them dead men. Make them dead to our praises. Make them dead to the praise of man.

Make them dead to ambition. Make them dead to any desire but to hear your voice and to bring your word to the people. That's the best prayer you can ever pray for those leading you in the house of God.

God killed them. Take everything out of their heart that's unlike Christ because the word that we bring to you often times is the word that you're going to end up living by. What are the days that take away the voice of God? And you see, when the voice of God is taken away, all that is left is religion.

All that is left is fancy robes and a brand new vernacular. A brand new language we bring into the house of God. All that's left is memorizing scriptures that we don't even believe.

Coming into the house of God, beginning to play a game. Bound by all kinds of sins. No longer really living in an actual relationship with God.

No longer being able to raise our hand and in truth saying where He leads me, I will follow. Leonard Ravenhill, one time I had an opportunity to spend a few days with him before he died. And he had a broken heart for what he was doing that I'm sharing with you tonight.

And I remember one night he was talking about the hymns should be literally rewritten in the house of the Lord. And one of the hymns is, he said it should be take my life and let me be. And the hymns actually take my life and let it be consecrated unto thee.

And he said if in truth we were singing the way our hearts really are in much of the church world today, people want Jesus, but they don't really want to hear His voice. They don't really want to walk with Him anymore. But that's not the way it was with Mary.

Mary said, no, I'm willing to look into this place of death and I'm willing to confess that I have a need. They've taken Him away. In Mark 16, 6, the scripture tells us that one of the angels, the angel that was there, said to her, He's not here.

And folks, if we have the courage tonight to look at some of our own personal ambitions, God's going to speak and say He's not here. Some of the things that we entertain and think that perhaps we're bringing it to the Lord and say Lord, please just sanctify this. Oh God, please just sanctify this relationship.

Oh Lord, just let me have this woman, this man, whatever your situation is, I'll be happy for the rest of my life. And if we're open to the voice of the Lord, He says, He's not here. This is a place of death.

Oh God, bless my business. He's not here. Oh God, bless my plans.

He's not here. He's risen. He doesn't live here anymore.

He's not in this realm of death anymore. He's in a realm of resurrection life and only those who want resurrection life are going to find Him. Only those who want to yield to Him are going to know Him, to live for Him.

Oh hallelujah. My prayer tonight is, Lord, show me the places where you are not in my life. Show me the areas of my heart where you are not.

And you know, if you and I sincerely ask the Lord to do that, God will do that. He will show you the areas where He is not in our lives because it really is not His will and plan for us. Then, and what he had thus said, when she had said thus in verse 14, she turned herself back and saw Jesus standing and knew not that it was Jesus.

He was there all the time. He was watching all of this, but He was waiting for something to happen. And Jesus said to her, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? You know, if it was just the sound of His voice that would identify Him, then she would have known who it was.

So it wasn't just the sound of His voice. You see, unless Jesus reveals Himself, you and I can't hear Him. He was speaking to her.

Later on, He calls her name and she knows who it is, but that's because He is God and He made the choice to reveal Himself. Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? And she, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, Sir, if you have borne Him hence, tell me where you have laid Him and I will take Him away. Hallelujah.

Now, this is what the Scripture speaks to me about. It speaks about the willingness on Mary's part to endure the scorn or the indifference of those who may not understand. In other words, I don't care what you think of me.

I don't even care what you think of Jesus. He is my life. I'm seeking Him.

I want Him with all of my heart. I'm pushing past the crowd. I don't care if you sneer at me.

I don't care if every gardener in this place sneers at me. I don't care if the soldiers laugh at me. I don't care if my friends think I'm insane.

He is my life. And I want Him with all my heart. There's no life apart from Him.

So, wherever He is, tell me and I'm going to take Him from there. She was willing, in a sense, to be identified with a corpse because that was her sense. That was her source of life.

Wherever you placed Him, I don't care if you understand or you don't. And folks, I want to tell you something. When you want to seek God with all your heart, you've got to get through a mass of people who don't understand.

Sometimes even in the house of God. Brother, what's wrong with you? Why can't you just be content with coming to church on Tuesday night or Wednesday night? Why do you have to insist on going to the mission field? Why do you have to insist on fasting? Why do you have to insist on speaking the Word? Why do you have to insist on being a Christian everywhere we go? I don't care what you think of me. He's my life.

Folks, face it. There's a scolding world out there and there's a scolding lukewarm church that will point its finger and laugh mockingly at those who seek Christ with all of their heart. And there's no getting around it.

There's no getting away from it. But Mary knew, I have nothing without Him. I'm empty without Him.

My life is meaningless without Him. I want Him with all of my heart. I don't care what you think of me.

He's my life. He is my life. She said, tell me where you've laid Him and I will take Him away.

And then Jesus said to her, Mary. After all of this, just one word. We sing that.

Just one word from Heaven. Mary. Mary.

And then all of a sudden it floods in. The three years, the miracles, everything just comes together. And the Scripture says she turned herself.

She had already turned to walk away from the garden. I think just in despair. If you can tell me where you've laid Him, I'll take Him away.

And she goes to walk away. And Jesus, seeing the discouragement, says, Mary. Mary.

Mary. When's the last time you heard Him call your name? When's the last time you went in the prayer closet and just heard Him speak your name? Just heard Him say, I love you. Just began to open the word and it began to ignite your soul one more time.

Your spirit was ignited by the word of God. What did she do? Well, just what she intended to do, even with the dead Savior. She went right to grab Him.

I'm not letting you go. He had to say, don't touch me. I'm not yet ascended to my Father.

Can you imagine? Rushing right to His feet. When I thought there was no hope, here you are. If you think you're going to get away from me again, you're not.

You're not going to get away from me. I'm not letting you go. I found you.

Hallelujah. That's what revival is all about. That's what being rekindled is all about.

I've heard your voice again and I'm never letting it go. I'm not letting it go. I don't care what anybody says.

I'm not letting it go. Because in you is life. And this life is the light of man.

I have heard it. I've comprehended it. You've changed my life.

I've yielded to your God and every promise you've ever made to me now has become a living reality. Now Jesus says to her, Touch me not. I've not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father and to your Father and to my God and to your God.

And Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that He had spoken these things unto her. And this is the last thing. The willingness to obey even at the risk of not being appreciated or believed.

Because they didn't believe her. And she knew they weren't going to believe her. And folks, when God sends you out to confess Him before men, there will be multitudes that don't believe you.

There will be multitudes that mock and say, He's dead. He died 2,000 years ago. There's no living Christ.

I know He's alive. I can hear Him. I know He's alive.

He spoke to me. I saw Him. I held His feet.

I searched for Him. I found Him. When the rest of you were making plans, forming committees for the future, I was there.

I heard Him. This was the one that Jesus revealed Himself to first. Remember that.

First was to Mary Magdalene. Then to the others. I was there.

I heard Him. He told me to tell you. And God's commission and command to us will never falter.

It will always be the same. He will always say, Go to those that I love. Go to those in the highways.

Go to them in the byways. Go to those in your office building. Go to those in your family.

Go to those in your community. Once you've touched me. Once you've known that I'm alive.

Once you've heard my voice again. And tell them. Tell them that I'm risen from the dead.

Even if they don't believe. Because one day I will come back again. You will be vindicated.

You will be shown to have been a truthful man, a truthful woman. But go to them and tell them. The willingness to be rejected.

The willingness to be not appreciated. The willingness to be unbelief. Has always been the call of the cross.

It will never be any different. Hallelujah. I want to hear his voice again.

I want to hear his voice as plainly as I have heard it over the years. I don't want religion to ever come in and crowd his voice out. I don't want death to lodge in my heart.

Oh, death can have a pretty face to it too. Death can come into your heart. It can come in with quoting scripture, folks.

Keep in mind the devil quotes scripture. It can come right into your heart. It can quote scripture.

Death can do all kinds of wonderful things. Now, they're not wonderful, but they seem wondrous at the time. And yet all they're doing is taking you farther and farther and farther and farther and farther away from Jesus.

But tonight, the Lord is speaking clearly to our hearts. I'm still there if you want me. That's all I really want to say tonight to you.

Jesus is saying, I'm still there if you want me. I haven't changed. I haven't moved.

You've just failed to recognize me. Because there are areas of death that you've let lodge in your heart. I've been asking the Holy Spirit to speak to my own heart.

I was in prayer a good part of this morning and early this afternoon. I'm just asking the Holy Spirit, speak to my heart. Because death can lodge in your heart and you can't even know it.

You don't recognize it. It's the Lord who searches the heart. Folks, if we search our own hearts, we'll come out squeaky clean every time.

It has to be the Holy Spirit that searches us. And the Holy Spirit begins bringing things to the surface. God, forgive me, Lord, I didn't see that.

And he brings something else to the surface. Oh, God, I didn't see that. I didn't recognize that that was taking me away from you.

And he brings another thing to the surface. But only the Holy Spirit can do that. And that's what fasting is all about.

That's what seeking God is all about. Don't let any of these weeds of the carnal nature, don't let any of the weeds of thinking of this generation get into my life. Don't let me fall short of what you have destined for me.

Of what you want to do through my life. It's not that any of us are searching for glory. We want to know Jesus.

If you love him, you want to serve him. I don't see any way around that. If we love him, we want to live for him.

If we love him, we want to hear him. I don't want to hear my own heart. Goodness sakes, what a waste of time to go into the prayer closet, come out and you've heard your own voice for 45 minutes.

What a foolish exercise that is. This phony voice, thus saith the Lord, coming out of your own heart. Thus saith the Lord, seek the job with the big income.

This is my plan for your life. You know, all it is is a camouflage. All it is is an absolute deception, because in the heart really death is beginning to reign.

Really only one voice that leads to life. Mary found it. I want to find it.

And when I have found it over the years, I don't ever want to let him go. I had an evangelist tell me one time, and I never forgot it because it branded itself in my spirit. He said, Carter, lose everything in your life.

Don't ever lose your love for Jesus. He said, if you lose that, you've lost it all already. You've lost everything.

And I want to challenge you with those words tonight. It's been a simple message, but Mary found him, and she was willing to obey him. And tonight I want to ask you, if we're willing to say, Holy Spirit, would you show us areas of death? Would you show me places that you're not? Would you speak to me? Okay, I'll lay before you my aspiration for a wonderful big career.

Am I open to the voice of God that says he's not here? Show you my desire for this relationship. Am I willing to hear your voice that says he's not here? He doesn't live there. It's death.

He lives only in the realm of resurrection life. I hope this message has not been too difficult to understand tonight. God in heaven, I ask, Father, in Christ's name, you've been speaking to us.

You're leading us. You're drawing us. Oh Lord, God, lead us.

Lead us to where you are. Lead us away from where you are not. You're not in anywhere that death is.

You're not there. Lead us to a place of life. Lead us as a people to hear your voice.

God, I ask tonight that in this house that you would absolutely expose and destroy other voices that are leading your people. God, I ask, Lord, that in every life, in every heart, of every person that sincerely seeks you, that there be one voice and one voice alone that they would listen to. That there would be discernment to know what is of you and what is not.

You said to the prophet Malachi in the last days that people are going to come back to God and they're going to discern what is and what is not of God. And Father, I thank you tonight that if we're willing to hear it, that you can do that for us. And you will do it, Lord, that we will hear you one more time and perhaps never lose touch with you again.

I plead tonight for those who are listening to another voice. I plead for those who are losing touch with you. God, in heaven, that you would expose the places of death and bring us to life.

Father, I ask it in Jesus' name. Now, I'm going to give an altar call in a moment. And as I do, I'm going to ask for those who can say, Pastor, what you've spoken tonight has spoken right to my heart.

The Holy Spirit is convincing me of something and I need to come and get it right with God. And then after we have a time of prayer at the altar, we're going to worship for about ten minutes or so, then we're going to go into an open microphone time of prayer for a short season this evening. I invite you to stay with us if you can.

And if you can't, please come back out tomorrow night. We're going to be speaking part two of the same word for people who have not left off seeking God but have a desire to go deeper in Him. As we stand together, Brother Warren, if you're here, if you could lead us in a chorus.

And for those who say, Pastor, you've spoken to my heart, the Holy Spirit has spoken to me tonight, I want out of places of death, I want to hear the voice of God. This is not a hip-hip-hooray service, folks, but I'll tell you the hip-hip-hoorays will come later on. When we get our lives right with God, that's where the joy begins to come into our life again.

For the people who have the courage to say, Lord, I'm in places of death, and maybe others who could say, I'm not sure, but Lord, I want you to examine my heart. Holy Spirit, I'm asking that you begin to speak to me. If I've become religious and I've stepped out of relationship, then Lord, show this to me. Show it to

me.

And lead me to life. Bring back to me again the joy of my salvation. If you've lost the joy of your salvation, that's a sign.

I've been, I guess, 22 years in the Lord now, and I've not lost the joy of my salvation, folks. I love Him like the day when He first saved me. As a matter of fact, I love Him more than the day He first saved me.

I've not lost the joy of that relationship, and I'm not willing to ever let it go. I want to encourage you and challenge you to do the same. Ask Him to show you.

Ask Him to show you tonight. Where have I settled for religion? Where have I let death reign? What's in my heart that's unlike Christ's? And I don't care what anybody says. I'm going to seek God with all of my heart.

Oh, Jesus. Jesus. There's no other name but Your name, Lord.

There's no other life like the life that You give. There's no other word but Your word. God, I want to hear Your voice.

Let's pray that tonight. Lord Jesus, forgive me for allowing things into my heart that have taken away the freshness of my first love relationship with You. I've been hearing a lot of voices, but there's only one voice that I know that gives me life.

Only one voice that speaks truth, that offers protection and healing and comfort in all of my afflictions. There's only one voice that offers me hope in my time of trial. Only one voice offers me direction in a world of confusion.

Jesus, it's Your voice. And like Mary, I want to hear Your voice. I want to hear You speak to me through Your word, through the leading of Your Holy Spirit.

God, take out of my heart every other place that would allow any other voice to try to lead me and try to speak to my life. I want just You, Jesus. Just Your voice.

Just Your life. Speak to me and give me the courage to be the person You want me to be and to do what You asked me to do. You said Your plans for me, to give me a desired end.

This is the conclusion of the message.

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