***VOICELESS Week 1 Sermon***

*God’s Sovereignty - The Lord Uses Us*

11:12 - 12:08

There is a story from the Old Testament about a man named Jonah. God calls Jonah and gives him very specific instructions. He tells Jonah to go to [Nineveh](https://www.britannica.com/place/Nineveh-ancient-city-Iraq)to tell the people about God and how they need Him or else they will not be saved. But he disobeys. And God, in His almighty power, uses a storm, a giant fish, a plant, and even a worm to bring Jonah finally into doing God’s will.

There are many lessons to take away from Jonah’s story but I am bringing it up today because it prompts a question that I believe is the same question we are being asked through this scene of the movie *Voiceless*: “What is God calling you to do . . . and will you follow Him?”

Let’s pray: *Father, we thank You for the way that You plan to use each and every one of us. We know that You will accomplish Your will, with or without us, but we hope that we might be obedient to Your calling on our lives. We pray that we can know Your heart better so we might know what You care about most, and how to respond in order to see Your kingdom come here on Earth. Amen.*

Today we are beginning a short series where every week we will begin with a clip from the movie *Voiceless*. It is a story about a man struggling with God’s calling on his life as he steps into an outreach ministry role at a church in downtown Philadelphia. Ultimately, the movie is about his fight against the abortion clinic that is across the street from the church. So we will be talking some about how to support what God is doing to protect the lives of unborn children and the fight against that evil, but today we must lay the foundation for this series by focusing on these two questions:

1. What is God calling you to do?
2. Will you follow His call on your life?

Before I get started today, I need to clear the air. This movie is largely about one man’s call to stand against abortion and to bring aid to pregnant women in crisis within his city. The movie makes it clear that abortion is wrong and that we have the responsibility to fight against the murder of unborn children. The film does not mince words. And I do not want to mince words with you: abortion is evil; it is a sin. **But** if you are here today and you have had an abortion or been part of the decision to have an abortion (I’m speaking to all of you, because men are oftentimes equally or even more responsible for these decisions), and you know the heart of God and have accepted His *eternal* forgiveness through belief in Jesus by grace, then the Lord does not condemn you. His forgiveness is eternal, thus wiping out the consequences of sin past, present, and future. You are not marked as murderer, as sinner, or as unclean. You are marked as pure, and we believe that God has mercy on the innocent, including on children who have no voice and no say.

Similarly, I want to remind you that shaming, pointing fingers, mocking, or condemning *anyone* is a sin. If you are or have been one of those among the Christian Church who has chosen to publicly condemn people for their sins, especially on this topic of abortion or on sexual immorality, then you have been a hypocrite and you are among those who blemish the world’s view of Jesus. You are one of the ones whom Jesus is referring to when He calls the Pharisees a “brood of vipers.” You use the shame of others to make yourself feel more holy and all the while you are walking in the opposite direction of Jesus. But just as those who have been involved in this sin of abortion are completely forgiven and told to go about their way and sin no more, so are you forgiven through faith by the grace of Jesus. You are not marked as hypocrite or as one who casts shade on others. So go, and leave your life of sin.

Again, if you have dealt with ANY sin that this series deals with, understand that God does not condemn you if you have come to Him and ask for forgiveness.

Now, let’s get started.

In this scene, the main character, Jesse, is helping out in this soup kitchen and the man he is working with senses that there is something different about Jesse. So, somewhat sarcastically, he finds a way to ask how Jesse ended up in the middle of the city serving soup. He says, “Let me guess . . . your dream was to come to Philadelphia and work at a big time soup kitchen and all your dreams have come true.”

The conversation leads us to find out that Jesse has been called to the city of Philadelphia by God and he is trying to serve God’s purpose, but the soup kitchen leader is there serving because he is on parole and he is paying back for a crime that he committed.

This scene is an example of God’s sovereign will and how He uses His people. God uses us to accomplish His purpose in the world. We can follow the call He has placed on us . . . or else He will find a way to bring us into that calling whether we like it or not, just like He did with Jonah! You see, in a sense, God tells us that we can do things “the easy way or the hard way.”

These two characters in the scene resemble the ways that God brings us into His calling. In other words, Jesse’s decisions are *in line with* God’s **will** for his life, and therefore he is able to walk with God and be used in His service, but the other gentleman has decided to go his own way. But through God’s power, His purpose is accomplished anyway.

Let’s talk about God’s *will*. “The will of God” is a phrase used often in Scripture and we tend to use it in church settings to talk about God’s purpose for us, but let’s break it down. The will of God is not as simple as saying, “This is what God wants.” It is much more than that because we know that God gets whatever God wants. God’s will looks much more like a *plan* than like a wish list. When we talk about “the will of God” we are very close to talking about God’s calling on our lives because we see that whatever He calls us to is a part of His will. Even if you disobey, He will accomplish His purpose for your life, with or without your help. This is one reason that we bring up the story of Jonah, but it is also the reason that Paul explains, “In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28, NIV). Because when you love God, your will is aligned with the will of God, and when you receive His call on your life, your purpose for living becomes the very purpose for which He created you.

The reason this is so important to bring up is because of what it says about who God is and His Sovereignty. We see this theme throughout Scripture, God does everything according to His will, and yet still uses us and gives us the choice:

“Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3, NASB). “Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps” (Psalm 135:6, NASB). He “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11, NASB). “From Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (Romans 11:36, NASB). “For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him” (1 Corinthians 8:6, NASB).

So we know God is all-powerful, but what exactly does this have to do with “calling”? Well, we see that Scripture affirms both divine sovereignty and human *responsibility*. Jesus says within the same chapter of John (NASB): in John 6:47 He says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life,” placing the responsibility of belief on us; and in John 6:65 He says, “No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.” Fully understanding the balance and relationship between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility is too big a task for the human mind to grasp, but it is important to acknowledge because, when it comes to the calling on our lives, the relationship between His sovereignty and our responsibility shows that God relieves us of three things:

1. We do not save ourselves.
   * “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8, NIV
2. We do save others.
   * “Salvation belongs to the LORD.” Jonah 2:9, ESV
3. We create our own way for our lives.
   * “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Hebrews 12:1, NASB

This should bring us great relief! God has assumed the responsibility of salvation by sending Jesus. He has assured us that He is the only judge and that we do not need to be the saviors or judges of others. He has already laid out the paths for our lives. All we must do is hold tight to belief in Him and run the race He has already set before us.

Did you notice that the man points out Jesse’s injured leg? Later in the movie, we find out that he has a limp because of an accident that happened during his deployment to Afghanistan. This small detail depicted in the scene is an important ~~one~~ because it reminds us that ultimately, the success of our ministry is up to *God*. He calls us, regardless of our flaws or scars, regardless of our sin or our blemishes, and the Holy Spirit is the true minister when we do God’s work. Again, this should bring you great relief! The salvation or decisions of another person don’t have to depend on how you present yourself or if you make mistakes in your ministry or if you have flaws that they can point to, because God is the one who is using you and working through you. God’s sovereignty overrules all human flaws.

Now, back to the idea of *calling*.

There are, as we can see from the Bible, both *corporate callings* and *personal callings*. Or you might say that there are things God asks of the entire Church and of all believers, and there are specific things He asks of single persons.

What corporate callings do we see in Scripture? One that we see over and over is that we are to obey God’s commands! We are told that murder is a sin, as well as adultery, idolatry, dishonorable behavior, and more. But simply following the Ten Commandments is not where the commands stop. We are also to protect life, to care for the poor and the widow, to be generous in all that we do, to work as working for the Lord, not for man. The mandate to protect life is written clearly throughout Scripture. When the Church turns its back on the corporate responsibilities God has bestowed upon us all the way back in Genesis to *fill the Earth and SUBDUE it*, we are disobeying the call that God has given us. We disobey when we do not give generously of our time and of our finances. We disobey when we are exclusive and ignore God’s missional call to *go and make disciples*. The call to protect life is a corporate calling.

But God also gives us *personal* callings. He has called me to be a pastor just as He has called someone to be a doctor or a businessman or a full-time mom. And, obviously, personal callings are different for everyone. For most of you, God may never call you and ask you to spearhead a campaign against an abortion clinic or to start up a pregnancy center to help mothers in crisis. But for some, that might be exactly what God is calling you to do. Regardless of your personal calling, we believe that the call to protect life and be a voice for the voiceless is part of the responsibility of all believers.

We will talk more about how to act on that corporate call in the coming weeks, but today I still want to focus primarily on the personal call that God has placed on your life.

If you’re sitting here and still thinking, “Well, I still don’t know what God is asking me to do . . . how would I even go about finding my *personal call*?” I want to challenge you to exercise three things in order to go after Jesus and to more clearly understand God’s call on your life:

1. Prayer
2. Patience
3. Practice

Prayer might be the most obvious, or at least the most simple, answer to the question of “What is God’s calling?”. Prayer may also be the most important. In Philippians 4:6-7, we are told to “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (NASB).

If the peace of God, which is greater than all comprehension, is promised to us through the act of prayer, then prayer must be considered as paramount in our pursuit of God’s will as an understanding of His purpose for our lives.

Why have we made it so difficult to ask that God reveal His purpose for us, either by revelation or by example in our lives? Even when there is no answer, even when we are forced to wait, even when we feel that there’s nothing to do but wait, God asks us to pray.

Which brings us to the next challenge of patience. Proverbs 14:29 says, “Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly” (NIV). If you seekunderstanding in any situation, especially understanding of what God is saying about your life, patience is an absolute necessity. But just saying, “Be patient” might be taking the easy way out. Patience, like many other virtues and fruits of the Spirit, is an action.

To exhibit patience is not to stand idly by waiting for God to finally part the clouds and speak to you about what He wants you to do. To exhibit patience is not to wait and try not to worry. Patience requires action, it requires pursuit, and it requires obedience, all while remaining within the promises that God gives us. Refuse to doubt and say that His calling will never come. Patience is necessary to understanding.

Both prayer and patience can be wrapped into the final challenge of practice. By practice, I mean the spiritual disciplines that will lead you into communion and conversation with the Lord. First Timothy 4:7 says, “Discipline your self for the purpose of godliness” (NASB). When we practice discipline, we put ourselves in a receptive position to the gifts, knowledge, and grace that God has for us. This allows our eyes, hearts, and ears to be attuned to the truth He is speaking into our lives about our calling, our purpose, and our identity in Him. Spiritual practices or disciplines can include prayer, worship, service, reading, meditation upon Scripture, fasting, retreat, Sabbath, etc.

A reminder, though: Rightly practiced, the spiritual disciplines take us deeper into the glories of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not away from it as though we have moved on to some advanced level of Christianity. If fasting or any other discipline mentioned does not bring you deeper into a relationship with Jesus or allow you to experience *freedom* in Him it is not a discipline you should force yourself into. A healthy practice for one person might be a terrible burden on another.

In summary, pursue Jesus and a deep relationship with the Lord with all of yourself, and be receptive to the truth that He has in store for you.

Closing prayer: *Father, reveal Yourself and Your calling to us so that we can be more like You. Thank You for providing the example of Jesus on Earth so that we can know Your heart and know what matters most to You. May we continue to follow Your will for our lives and come together as one Church so that You may be glorified. We continue to ask that You would do a mighty work in this country to rid us of all injustices, including abortion. You are bigger than this issue and we put our trust in You. Amen.*