

IS ANYONE LISTENING?

Because our property backs onto bush, we tend to get various animals roaming around our yard. We just love seeing deer make their way onto our property. Sometimes we spot them, but other times we are aware of their visit by the tracks they left behind. One night we actually spotted a mother and father skunk leading their little stinkers from the front of our property into our back bush. We enjoyed watching this display from inside the safety of our house as opposed to coming upon them unexpectedly outside. Since COVID we have also been aware of some coyotes around our property. I have not seen them myself, but I hear their howls close by, and my neighbour spotted one coming out from our backyard early one morning. We see our fair share of squirrels, rabbits, and chipmunks and on one occasion a flock of wild turkeys.

Recently I spotted a very large racoon in my car port. I was in the kitchen making a bowl of cereal for my bedtime snack when I heard a loud noise outside. I looked out my side door and sure enough spotted a big raccoon trying to get into my shed door where I keep my garbage. I banged on the window in order to try and scare it off, but it did not move at all. I decided to shout at it next hoping that my booming preacher voice might scare it off. That did not work either. I guess I should have added some fire and brimstone to the tone of my voice. Finally, I opened the door which got the raccoon's attention. It scurried around the side of the house and returned into the bush. I went outside shortly afterward to secure the door to our shed and made sure there was no way it could get into the garbage if it made a return visit that night.

The next morning, I began thinking about the raccoon not listening and responding to me banging on the window or shouting. I could not blame the raccoon for failing to listen because it has been suggested by one of my family members that I am a selective listener. I think it is something that all husbands come to be known for. I don't blame my parishioners either if they do not listen to every word in my sermons. Before becoming a minister, I sat in the pews and found my mind wandering during a sermon or two and as a result missed hearing certain key points. I am sure teachers at this time of year understand when their students may not be listening too attentively with the end of the school year fast approaching. We understand why people may not listen carefully in these and other situations.

As I journeyed down this thought process I was reminded how we see in the Bible that David at times questioned whether God was listening to him.

Psalms 13:1,3 is one instance where we see David question this:

O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? Turn and answer me, O Lord my God!

Reading through various Psalms, we often see David question whether God was truly listening. This feeling often arose in David when he felt God was being slow to act on his behalf. Like David, we too may begin to wonder this when we become impatient waiting upon God. David came to understand however that God is truly listening when we speak to Him. He also came to understand that it is not only when we offer up words of praise or confession that God is listening but also when we share our complaints and frustrations with Him. This understanding from David is seen in **Psalms 64:1**:

O God, listen to my complaint. Protect my life from my enemies' threats.

The Bible makes it very clear that God is willing to listen to whatever we want to say to Him, but I wonder, is the same true when it comes to us? The reason why I wonder this is that according to James in his letter, hearing what God is saying to us is only one aspect when it comes to listening:

But just don't listen to God's word. You must do what it says.

Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves, for if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in the mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. (James 1:22-25)

We may think we are listening to what God is telling us, but the true indicator of this is whether we are **putting into action** what we have heard and learned from Him. Hopefully we are not falling into the category of hearing what God is telling us and then walking away and forgetting. As James tells us, we are missing out on many blessings by doing so.

The big raccoon I saw recently has made a few more appearances in my carport since. I have not seen it, but I have heard it make a few crashing noises tipping over obstacles I have put in front of our shed door to prevent him from getting into my garbage. If I am willing to listen, learn, and respond with action to the noises I hear the raccoon making, don't I owe it to my Creator to do the same when I hear Him? Don't we all?

Keep Safe and God Bless

Pastor Dean