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Sermon Transcript: Are you Listening?

I know someone who is in their first year teaching. My husband and I had her over for dinner this week and we asked, "How's it going?" First year teaching. She said it was going well overall, but the most frustrating thing was that the kids talk too much. She has K through eight. And she went on to clarify that like it's okay for them to talk when they're in groups and they're doing certain things, and she knows that kids talk a lot because I was like, well, you know, that's kind of part of the gig is kids talk. But she said they were constantly talking over the top of one another, interrupting each other, and even talking when she was giving directions and teaching. That was the problem with all of the talking.

And I think unfortunately this phenomenon is not just a classroom problem, is it? Have you ever joined a group of people expecting a nice conversation and instead you entered into a battleground? You're like, "Yeah, one where there's always at least two or three people talking over the top of one another, vying for attention, convinced that their monologue is more important than anyone else's monologue." We—I think we're all guilty of some of that to some degree at one time or the other. Maybe you're like, "I'm a phenomenal listener. I'm an amazing listener, Pastor Alex, in most circumstances." But then you go to a family gathering and you're around your siblings and all of a sudden you revert and it becomes an intense competition for attention and you're all talking over the top of one another again, just like childhood. Listening goes out the window sometimes.

The Problem with Noise

Hebrews 1 begins by reminding us that God speaks. God spoke to humanity over the course of human history. And God spoke through God's son, Jesus Christ. God spoke, speaks, and continues to speak. We often struggle to listen. Listening requires silence.

So this morning I want to talk about silence. In order to talk about silence, we can't have silence. And I know the irony is not lost on me, but here we are. There are two types of silence that I want to kind of distinguish between. There's the silence of apathy and complicity—the silence where refusing to speak can be problematic and hurtful. And there's a silence that makes space through an absence of sound or noise for you to listen. In this case, we're talking about listening to what God may be saying to you. A silence that may lead to you hearing God nudge you to do or say something.

I want to talk about that second type of silence this morning. But especially this week, I do not want it to be confused for the first. There is too much noise in our lives. Noise from podcasts, YouTube, social media, audiobooks, television, radio. We may have our own kind, our own style of noise, but we all have noise in our lives. We get in the car and immediately have the radio playing, or if you have a newer car, the minute you start it up, it connects to your phone and starts playing

the most recent podcast or song, whatever you were listening to. So you don't have a moment of silence. It just picks up right where you left off.

This past month, our young adult book club read the book *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis. And it was a really creative style for the time. It was written as fictional letters from a devil named Screwtape to his nephew Wormwood. I know it's a little bit old, it's an old classic, but the low-level demon Wormwood was getting tips and tricks on how to trip up his human charge and cause him to sin. It's an older book, but it's a classic for a reason. And one of the things that Screwtape, who's writing these letters to his nephew, hates—he says he hates silence and music. And he celebrates noise—Noise with a capital N—even as that's something that helps their cause. And he tells his nephew that the goal is to make the whole universe full of noise and that research is in progress on the noise front. *The Screwtape Letters* was published in 1942. I'd say C.S. Lewis had a prophetic voice because there is still a great deal, maybe even more noise in 2026. Noise that we create, noise that we listen to, noise that exists around us, noise—you know, there's even noise machines. Some people call them sound machines, but they even have machines to create just noise.

All of that can make it hard to listen when God is speaking. And Hebrews 1 reminds us that God has been speaking to us for a very long time.

Establishing Common Ground in Hebrews

We don't know a bunch about the letter to the Hebrews, which some scholars would argue is not even really a letter. We do know that it was written after 50 AD and before 90 AD for you history buffs. It was written to Jewish Christians or Christians who are at least very familiar with Jewish traditions and practices. Written to Christians who, as described later in the book of Hebrews, were becoming sluggish and already beginning to neglect to meet together. So, we kind of know that about the book of Hebrews that we're going to be exploring this month.

And these first four verses begin us with a statement of faith. It's not a teaching or admonishment. We get more into that as we go, but this is kind of a—a what we believe. It's a "we can all agree on this, can't we?" kind of statement of faith. The first four verses of Hebrews establish a common ground of belief. And then it goes on to distinguish further who Jesus is and who Jesus is not. But what they could all agree on is that God spoke over the course of human history in a variety of ways. And God speaking is a major theme in this first chapter of Hebrews.

As Christians, we believe that God continues to speak into our lives, that God is not done speaking, that the word of God is active and living, and that scriptures continue to remain relevant, and that the Holy Spirit is our guide. But we cannot hear what God is saying if we aren't listening. If our lives are a constant battleground of different voices and noise trying to be heard—you know, I think this is really, and I do this so it's not—it's calling me out too: When you have the TV on and you've got your phone, your smartphone, and maybe you're even watching something on your smartphone and then you're having a conversation with someone in the other room. All of

that noise. We're guilty of it, right? Or when you're in a discussion and three people are talking over the top of one another, vying for attention. We're guilty of it.

Leaving Space for God to Direct

I recently read that when having a conversation with someone else, if you leave space for silence, intentional silence, it gives the other person the space and ability to choose the direction of the conversation, which was obviously—it stuck with me. Instead of just this constant back-and-forth stream of consciousness between two people, if you leave silence in the conversation, just a few beats, it gives the other person the ability to direct where they might want to take that conversation.

Don't you think that perhaps by leaving space for silence in our conversations with God, we give space for God to direct the conversation instead of it just being a constant stream of us prattling at God about whatever is going on in our lives? When we pray, do we leave space, silence for us to listen for God to speak into our lives? Listen for God to nudge us in ways that may lead us to speak up or act or do something specific to love our neighbors. Listen for God to show us what is right and wrong. Listen for God to show us when silence is complicity and something that does not love our neighbor as ourselves. Listen for God to speak into our lives.

I don't want you to not talk to God. God wants to hear from us. God wants to hear your prayers. God is okay with how chatty we can be. But there is also an appropriate time for us to be silent so that we can hear when God gives directions, because God is still speaking. We just merely need to listen.

Amen.

Amen.