Continuing this morning in our series on worship, let’s briefly recap. Remember that we affirmed that worship is a lifestyle: Our work, our service, our boasting in the Lord. Worship as a lifestyle means prioritizing Christ in obedience and surrender. As believers, we are called to be active, engaging God and giving our devotion to God and Him alone. This active worship, family, involves our entire being. It involves our service, modeling our dedication to our friends and family. In our reading in Deuteronomy, Moses calls for devotion and commitment: “Hear, Israel!” The word for “hear” in this appeal is “*Shema*.” It means “to hear, to listen with your whole person.” Traditionally, this prayer is offered by Jewish believers from the moment they awaken in their commitment to focus their attention on God rather than on things of this world. In fact, this prayer is called “*The Shema*.” *Shema* is not casual listening. It implies full attention and action! It’s an invitation for us to listen and to respond: to appreciate, to understand, and to act. Shema is a focused, intentional attention.

*The Shema* brings to mind the words of Jesus: “He who has ears to hear”(Matt. 13:9; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8). Jesus calls His people to pay careful attention, to block out all of the noise and distractions of everyday life and to worship by listening to God and then obeying. Family, who or what has your attention? Matthew 22:37, “Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” ***ALL!*** Jesus calls us to hear, to

love, and to listen with a full, devoted, undivided attention. God speaks out of the tenderness of His Grace: Jesus said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). But family, listen! Jesus did not just speak to His followers in the 1st century CE! God still speaks to us today. We can hear Him

through prayer, through study of His Word, through events of our time, and

through the majesty of His creation. When God created the world, He spoke it

into existence (Psalm 29:3-9\*). And in His Grace, He still speaks to His children. But are we listening?

Paul calls on believers to hear “by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17). Sometimes, we have a hard time hearing from God because we have already made up our minds about what we want Him to say. Here’s the truth: God will never contradict His Word. And God is more than willing to speak, but are we praying in “shema,” undividedly listening for and to Him? John 5:39 tells us that “They [scripture] testify about me.” Listen! The goal of reading the Bible is not to accumulate data but to encounter Jesus. Scripture provides opportunity for focused, intentional, worship of Jesus and His Father God. In Isaiah 55:11, the prophet tells believers, “so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” We don’t just follow words on paper; we engage the King of Kings. He speaks through His Word. He also speaks through prayer. Prayer is an act of worship. Prayer is not a monologue. No, it is a dialogue. We should not approach prayer lightly, respectfully, planning to encounter the One who placed the stars above. Prayer brings us into the presence of God! Prayer directs our focus to God. It is not the presenting of a “want list” but the presenting of ourselves to Him.

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\*Psalm 29:3-9

3 The voice of the Lord is over the waters;

the God of glory thunders,

the Lord thunders over the mighty waters.

4 The voice of the Lord is powerful;

the voice of the Lord is majestic.

5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;

the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

6 He makes Lebanon leap like a calf,

Sirion[a] like a young wild ox.

7 The voice of the Lord strikes

with flashes of lightning.

8 The voice of the Lord shakes the desert;

the Lord shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

9 The voice of the Lord twists the oaks[b]

and strips the forests bare.

And in his temple all cry, “Glory!”

Because of Christ’s sacrifice, we have direct access to the throne of grace. Prayer is our communion with God. The purpose of prayer is to get God. That’s worship. Every believer needs to take time in prayer. Each needs to listen at least as much as he asks for intercession. We don’t get just talk and leave. We need to be still and know and listen. We need to listen for His will, His direction, His heart—in surrender, in obedience, in reverence, with focused hearts:

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.[a] 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’” Mark 12:28-30

Jesus’ reference to the greatest command should draw our full attention. The Shema, prayed daily for thousands of years as a point of focus. God calls us to be ***ALL*** in! --fully engaged in our listening, offering complete attention. Family, the Lord your God is devoted to you. Shema is a reminder to focus our devotion, purposefully, every day. If your attention is offered without distraction, that is undivided attention, you will hear Him. God still speaks. Jonah, Moses, Paul, Elijah—the same God who has spoken to them, speaks to you. How’s our focus, your dedication? How’s your Shema?

Passages in support of this sermon:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.[a] 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Psalm 40:10-11

10 I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;

I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help.

I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness

from the great assembly.

11 Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord;

may your love and faithfulness always protect me.

James 1:19-22

9 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.