

DOES GOD STILL SPEAK TO US?

May I speak and may we hear the word of God this evening.

Have you noticed; We live in a noisy world. I don't mean the nah nahs belting up and down the road, or the gravel lorries. No - I am not talking about physical noise, By noisy, I mean

Lots of competing ideas, competing ideologies, competing standards of living, and ideas of what is right and wrong,

And all of these different noises seem to be talking at once.

And have you ever noticed that even in a crowd, every once in a while you will be able to hear a distinctive voice above the din. I recall being in a cocktail party in the Mess when suddenly we heard a voice above all the rest of the hubbub: "and I left the body on the lawn!"

Our world is certainly loud, and every voice seems to be shouting for it's own attention. Is it any wonder that we so often miss the voice of God in our lives.

But God **does** want to make himself known - we see it so often in the Bible. For example: In 2 Peter we read: The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. This patience is the call of God to all of us, over and over again.

If we actually do hear, and if we truly repent, and come in faith to Jesus as Lord and Saviour, then he has promised life - eternal - abundant life.

I know I sound like an old time revivalist preacher, but sometimes we need to hear again what they said. And we need to listen to what God is saying.

Hear a word or two from Hebrews "Long ago God spoke many times and in

many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son". God has consistently spoken - to individuals, to gathered congregations, to nations. He spoke in and through the ultimate revelation of Himself - through his son. But was that his last word? Did he then stop speaking?

One of the problems I have with Islamic faith is that no further word from God is allowed to have been spoken or heard following the Prophet's revelation, as set out in the Qur'an. For Moslems, the word of God is set in concrete. I fear that for some Christians the word of god is set in the Elizabethan prose of the King James Version.

Some people say that God really did stop speaking to the world since the day days of the new Testament. But God didn't stop speaking to people who would listen after the Ascension. No, because he sent the Spirit, which Jesus promised - ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.

A simple question - if the Spirit is to tell us what he has heard, and guide us toward the future God has in mind for us - how can he do it if God has stopped speaking.

God **is** still speaking to us today. And if God is still speaking to us today, why do we so often find it difficult to hear Him over the noise of the world?

Is it because we don't recognise his voice? Well, it shouldn't be for those of us who are believers because the Lord said; "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. God's voice is distinctive.

And if that's true, we ought to be able to discern his voice. So why is it so often drowned out by the noise of the world, and let's face it, it is.

In the story of the sower, Jesus gives us a clue - its all about preparing the ground: and I think we should not think first about the 'them' out in the parish - the 3,000 or so souls who need to hear the word of God. I think we need to think about ourselves and seek to hear what Jesus is saying to **us** about the fact that we don't hear his word so much - if at all - today.

How do we - today - 2,000 years later - hear the word of God? I think Jesus points out the answer to this question for all time, in the story of the sower.

Most Christian people read this passage, and they see that Jesus mentions the word 'saved' in the private explanation of the parable which he unpacks for the disciples, and they relax and think to themselves: "Oh, OK, this applies to *them* and not to me - I am already a believer".

Well of course, responding to God's call for salvation is part of responding to His word, but if we read on to verse fifteen we hear Jesus talking about **bearing fruit**. That is not only the fruit of salvation - it is the fruit of lives lived out in the here and now according to God's will and word. Jesus talks of the Kingdom as already beginning. God's Kingdom is both Now and Not Yet.

Our task is the 'now'. You and I need to listen to the word of God through the Spirit, in order to bear fruit of the Kingdom of Heaven in the present day. So then, we need to prepare the ground.

Some of the seed, that is the Word fell on compacted soil; we all know about the way seed was sown in the Middle East - cast out of an open bag or basket in handfuls - in big sweeping casts. As a boy, I saw farmers do it in Jersey on the steep field where no mechanical drill could go. Some of that seed would fall on the paths around and through the field. Seed that landed in these areas could not take root; they could produce nothing.

But the path was made up of the **same** soil as the good ground. It was just trodden in, that's all. The seed sat on the top of the flat hard earth - got blown

off perhaps, got wash away down the ditch?

I think that sometimes you and I can be 'hard' and unreceptive, and the word of God gets blown off, like so much dust. What do I mean by 'hard' - what makes us hard? What follows are only suggestions. You may well think they don't apply to you. But they might, just might, sometimes.

What are some causes of a hard heart? Perhaps it's pride.

Pride can cause us to ignore God's word in a given situation - "I know what God says, but I know what I want." or "I know what God has said, but He doesn't understand **my** situation." And perhaps the pride of superiority - "That may have been true then, but this is now. They were ignorant peasants. We are people of the enlightenment!"

Or perhaps:

I don't need God's involvement in this. I can handle it on my own. This is too small for God to worry about; I can handle the small stuff on my own.

Isn't it really pride that makes us say from time to time, "I've always handled or done it this way in the past."

If we are not hearing God's voice in a situation, we might need to take a look at ourselves, and make sure that our own pride has not hardened the soil of our hearts.

Or is it fear? Sometimes fear can cause us to miss the word of God. What if I pray and God asks me to do something I don't want to do? Happens all the time.

Moses argued: send someone else. Not me. Jeremiah tried a different tack: "O Sovereign LORD," I said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!" The LORD replied, "Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. And God knew what the problem really was, because he

goes on: "And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken!" Don't be afraid. Not always easy, is it?

We feel God's call to say something to a friend but we block it out with: "I haven't the words - the knowledge - I am shy about talking of God - I'll be laughed at - and so on! Fear shutting out the word of God. Fear can be a very strong block when it comes to hearing the word of God.

Another cause of compacted, hard soil may be Bitterness. Bitterness can shut out the word of God. Paul writes - If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with everyone. "But God, you don't **really** know what that person has done to me." "But God, you don't know what it's like to work with that kind of person." "When *they* come to **me**, then I'll make peace." But Jesus says: do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

If we cannot really hear God's voice in our hearts, could it be we need to have a look inside - pride, fear, bitterness.

If we want to hear from God, we must prepare the soil of our hearts in order to open our ears to hear. We have to soften up the trodden down, get rid of rocks, tear out the thorns.

I'm not going to examine all the different types of soil that Jesus speaks about in great detail. There simply isn't time.

In many a field there are rocks under a thin layer of topsoil. I wonder what Jesus might mean about them in the lives of his servants here. Unlike the path, which is just hard good soil. A rock is different. It has to go. Could it be that we have a real unconfessed sin - or some form of private and secret vice which we hang on to, despite the fact that we know it is getting in the way of God's word. The rock has to be dealt with.

What about the thorns. I think the that thorns are all these noises that drown

out the still small voice. This is one of *my* real problems. Whenever I settle down to be quiet with God, I have a stream of irrelevant thoughts which come streaming in. When I pray the same thing happens. Removing the thorns for me means constant practice and effort to settle my thoughts on to the Lord.

For other people, the thorns may go like this:

We have to make a living in order to pay the bills; We have children to raise; We have spouses or partners to be concerned with; We have health issues, personal issues, immediate issues, and the list goes on and on.

And all the while these issues are there, God is trying to speak to us and not getting through - though is still speaking.

I cannot possibly suggest ways in this short time of dealing with all these thorns. There isn't some sort of spray that will make them all go away. The gardeners here know that there are brambles which take a lifetime to clear. In our hearts, it takes thought and prayer and work. But it is possible and we can clear a space for god. and the more space we clear, the easier it gets to live God centred lives.

Let me end, like the good old evangelical preacher - who asks some good hard questions:

I. What is God saying to you right now? He **is** trying to get through.

What has God said to you recently? He's looking for a willing heart.

Is your heart receptive to what will God say to you next? If we are receptive, we will hear.

But as for that seed in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

Lord speak to us, and may we hear, and may we bear fruit for you. Amen