

Coach House Church BEACONS

DOES GOD SPEAK?

5TH MAY 2020

As far I can remember, I've always believed in God, but I hadn't made any definite adult commitment to follow him. Until I was in my late 20's, and various things made me begin to think again about where my life was going, and what I said I believed. I was in a new job. The girl at the next desk was lovely – a very attractive, vibrant personality, brimming with life. Somehow, I was really drawn to her – she was a bit different and she clearly had something I needed in my own life. The only trouble was, she kept going on about God, speaking about him with great certainty. I found this rather irritating – how could she claim to know so much? What made her such an expert? So, out of mixture of irritation and curiosity, at her recommendation, I secretly bought a bible and began to read.

Well, that was an experience. I had no real idea of the structure of the bible, the flow of the story, or where to begin – I mean, it's a big book! But as I opened it fairly randomly each day – I was astonished how often this book seemed to oddly hit the spot. The very thing I had been worrying about – there was the answer, in the Bible. It was as if, not only was I reading the book – the book was reading ME. As if it knew the events of my day, the thoughts of my heart, the anxieties, the insecurities, the pride, the pain. It seemed to describe my past and maybe even my future. How could this be?

According to the bible, "All Scripture is God breathed (that is inspired by God, written down by a human but inspired by His Holy Spirit), and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" This is what the bible was doing in me – teaching me the ways of God, correcting me, even rebuking me – and training me in righteousness.

And what I was experiencing was that the Logos – the written word of God, is quickened and brought alive by his Holy Spirit so that the Word – written down hundreds or even thousands of years ago - speaks to me, here and now, in my specific situation.

Yes – that’s the answer to my question - God does speak – through His living, active Word. Amazing. The Bible itself says “the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates to divide soul from spirit, joint from marrow. It discerns the thoughts and attitudes of the heart”.

But it’s not only through the written word that God speaks. As I delved into the written word, the Bible, I discovered that God has always spoken – long before his words were ever committed to a page. His Voice is at the very heart of creation. I discovered that God spoke the world into being. That first chapter of the Bible – the book of Genesis - says the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep. And then, God SPOKE - “Let there be light”, and there was light. And he continued to speak, and spoke forth sky, and land and sea, plants, and planets, birds and animals. And He finally spoke man into existence.

Did this speaking God ever lose his voice?

No! As the Bible unfolds, we see God speak directly to his servants - to Abraham and Moses, to the kings and the prophets. Finally, Jesus comes to the earth and Bible says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”. Jesus is identified as the very Word of God. And we see Jesus – the Son of God, who is God – speak directly to men as a human, face to face with people. In the markets, in the synagogue, at home with the family, with his friends, with his enemies.

As we remember now in this Easter season, Jesus knew he would be crucified; that he’d die and rise again. He knew he would never again live with his disciples in the same way – walking and talking to them in human form. He knew his friends would be bereft – they had grown used to this regular daily conversation with Jesus, his wisdom, his guidance, his comfort. So before he went to his death, he made a promise. He promised that they – and we - would not be left alone in the world – left lost and friendless like orphans. He said “I will ask the father and he will give you another

Comforter (another Counsellor, another constant companion) to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of Truth” This Spirit of Truth – the Holy Spirit – is alive and active in the world, and enters our lives fully as we commit our lives to Jesus Christ. I had no one to explain this to me when I first made a decision to follow Jesus. But I soon discovered that as well as God speaking through His written word – He began to speak inside me too. I found the reality of that ever-present Comforter, Counsellor, and Friend. Now I was not only reading something external to me – words on a page - I could hear the voice of God deep inside.

Now that might sound a bit weird - how does that work?

Well, the best way I can explain it is this. If you're anything like me, there's a dialogue going on inside all the time, a constant inner dialogue in my head. Often about nothing much - about what to cook for dinner, what needs doing at work, replaying a conversation, or what I'll say when I next meet a friend. Sometimes it's positive – looking forward to something nice, sometimes negative – beating myself up for something I've not done or planning a sharp response to someone who has upset me. If we're honest, we constantly talk to ourselves, in our thoughts, all the time. We're very familiar with us speaking to ourselves.

But once Holy Spirit came in, I found – if I listen carefully – there another Voice there too. A Voice much kinder and more compassionate. Wiser. A Voice, that if I am willing, will speak a different word altogether than the word I speak to myself. A voice of love. And of correction, of warning. But always drawing me back to something higher than myself. I've learned to recognise this as the voice of the Holy Spirit.

People always ask me - how can you tell its him? This used to confuse me no end –how could I be sure it was God speaking? Until it dawned on me – the voice of God is clearly different from my own voice. Its full of patience, love, kindness, wisdom. It's a Voice that isn't self-seeking and proud, seeking to score points. It's a Voice that keeps no record of wrong and always seeks the best. It cuts across my normal thinking. It doesn't bring darkness, condemnation and death – it brings grace and life and peace. It's a voice in keeping with the character of God. And as I read the bible, the written word, I get to know the tone of Gods voice, in his spoken word. And it gradually becomes easier to recognise that Voice, the Holy Spirit.

Remember, God won't ever speak anything contrary to his written word. And if you are seeking to make a big decision – speak to other people, don't just trust your own interpretation – especially if you are just learning to hear. Gradually you'll get more confident about discerning the voice of God. But there's real wisdom in seeking the counsel of other people.

But with that proviso – dive in, don't be afraid. Listen. God is speaking. In this time of quietness, in lockdown, listen for the Voice of God in His word, and by His Spirit. Amen.

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