

When God Speaks

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Psalm 50; Hebrews 11:1-8

Let us pray: *May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen.*

Some years ago Jennifer came to me unsure of what to do about her young son. She said her son, Jimmy, had resisted potty training. He told her that he was afraid he might have an accident and other children might laugh at him. And he told her, “God spoke to me in the bathroom and God said it was alright if I went on wearing diapers.” Jennifer did not know what to do with that. Her concern was that Jimmy was to start pre-school in the fall and they would not take him if he was still wearing diapers. I suggested that she bring him to Sunday School. She did and he loved it. He said to her that he wished it were longer and not just on Sunday.

Jennifer told him that Preschool was like Sunday School only longer and every day, Monday through Friday. She told him that if he was still wearing diapers he couldn’t go to preschool at the church.

At some point in the summer, Jimmy began to say he didn’t want to wear diapers and he went three days with no problems. She asked him what had happened to change his mind. He said to her, “Mommy, God spoke to me in the bathroom and he said, “Jimmy, it is alright not to wear diapers. So decided to use the bathroom.”

Jennifer was glad for the progress but concerned about Jimmy saying God spoke to him. She came and asked me about it.

She said to me. “I don’t know whether to believe him or not that God spoke to him in the bathroom!”

I said, “You don’t know and I don’t know if God really spoke to him in the bathroom or not. But you say he has not been wearing diapers and he has been doing well. You and your husband are the ones who have been teaching him to pray at mealtimes and bedtime. Why shouldn’t God talk to him bathroom? If I were you I would believe him. And I would thank God for telling your little boy what he needed to hear.”

Now, let’s spin ourselves backward in time about 2,600 years to the early Kingdom of Israel. David is a wonderful character in the story of the people of Israel. Throughout his life he faces trouble. Sometimes his very life is put on the line. But from the very first time we hear of him he is chosen by God and anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the future king of Israel.

We know from the beginning he lives within God’s gift of grace. A great crisis comes in David’s life before he becomes the King. He is serving in the court of King Saul. But Saul in his growing madness comes to distrust David and wants to kill him.

Without food or weapon nor a companion, David flees from King Saul. He finds his way to the Temple at Nob.^{[1][1]} He requests Ahimelech, the priest, to give him bread.

The priest faces a quandary. The bread he has, has been offered on the altar. What is the proper use of sacrifices to God? In the end, the priest

gives David the bread to eat and he gives him Goliath’s sword so he has a weapon.

Psalm 50 is very unusual. There is not another psalm quite like it. It is attributed to David’s Chief Musician, Asaph, who is also a prophet. Or, perhaps David wrote Psalm 50 and sent it to Asaph for performance.

In any case, the subject matter is about what is a ‘right sacrifice’ in worship to our God. The psalm rejects most sacrifice as unacceptable. This in itself is unique in the psalms and strange. This psalm was to be used in the Temple, the very place where the focus of worship was on making sacrifices. This psalm is also unusual for it tells us a story presented as a courtroom drama. That story is about what it means “when God speaks.”

The story begins focused on God who is the main character. To stress that, God is named three times: “the Mighty One,” “God,” and “Lord.” God speaks and summons the whole earth to come to him. This is the ultimate call to the principle’s office. In front of God there is a devouring fire, and a mighty storm is all around him.

When God speaks, God calls the ‘faithful ones,’ who had made covenant with him. God tells

them they are to be judged because they have misunderstood what sacrifice in worship is about. This psalm tells the people that sacrifice in worship is about life - not death. It is a dialogue between God and people, not a manipulation. It is about preserving and advancing life for those God loves. By the grace of God - we are included! The psalm teaches us that our gifts to God and our worship are about living in the covenant with God.

The truth is that God, to whom everything in the world belongs, doesn’t need our sacrificial gifts. Nor does God need to eat the sacrificial bread in the Temple at Nob. David needs the bread for life! And, the priest as the servant of the Lord feeds it to David! God’s grace to David has been with him from the beginning and continues with him at every critical moment of his life.

The psalm is presented as a courtroom trial. In that trial God has all the important roles: prosecutor, judge, chief witness, and bailiff. Throughout the trial God speaks to us, his people, who are on trial. Listen to what God says when God speaks:

When God speaks, he begins by reminding us that our lives begin in grace. Just as the people

“When God speaks we receive grace. And, when we respond with gratitude, we...receive our salvation and flourish as the grateful children of God.”

of Israel were brought into God's covenant with Abraham, so we are brought in by the grace of our salvation in Jesus. We too are children of the covenant. Unfortunately, we also worship in ways that sometimes fail to honor God and be a sacrifice of thanksgiving to him.

When God speaks God lays out the charges against us: we hate discipline; we make friends with evil people; we let our mouths run wild; and slander our own mother's child. But in God's mercy this is not the end of the story.

When God speaks, he declares that he will not put up with our forgetting that he is God. We are but God's people. If we forget that God alone is God, there will be no rescue for us.

When God speaks the message is 'pay attention, do not forget me.'

When God speaks we remember that God is completely beyond and different and more powerful than the most powerful of any of us.

When God speaks we remember the grace of our covenant relationship with God. In that Covenant:

God is God. We are God's people.

God provides for our needs.

We do not provide for God.

It is God who is host at the table of the Lord, we are invited guests.

God does any judging that needs to be done.

We are not to judge - either God or each other.

When God speaks we must listen to the very end because, at the end, God gives us grace once again. He sets aside the judgment we deserve and gives us salvation instead.

This Table we call the Lord's Table is the proof and the symbol of God's salvation for us.

When God speaks it is not in order to condemn us but in order that the Word spoken might be our salvation. As John 3:17 says, "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

And as I Thessalonians 5:9 says, "For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

When God speaks God calls us to live with thanksgiving. God says, "Bring thanksgiving as your sacrifice to honor me and I will show you salvation." We have hope; we have salvation; we have promise; we have the love of God.

This takes us to the passage from Hebrews 11. It is a passage I love because it talks about people who live by faith. There is hope, then, that the escape from judgment can be for our whole lives. It is possible for us real and fallible people to live within the Covenant. And we do so by Faith. "1Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

We are given a whole list of people in Hebrews 11 who give thanks for God and God's promises in their lives. It begins,

"By faith Abel... by faith Enoch ... by faith Noah ... Abraham ... Isaac ... Jacob ... Joseph ... Moses ... Rahab ... Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets.

Because of their faith and gratitude for their relationship in covenant with God, they: conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, they were mighty in war and put foreign armies to flight.

The point is that we - by faith - are called to live lives that are grounded in gratitude to God - Gratitude for the Covenant through which God loves and claims us. This is not some relationship we are doomed to fail. Though we are intensely human, the God of all power and might is the God of love who is on our side.

Not only can we live this life by faith, but we can, by the grace of God, do great things - holy things - loving things.

We can love God, and love neighbor. We can build safe and usable facilities for the use of ministry and mission. We can nurture children - and all of us - in joyful faith, extravagant generosity, helping neighbors in need, welcoming all in inclusive hospitality, and reaching out in Jesus' name in sacrificial mission.

When God speaks we receive grace. And, when we respond with gratitude, we - by faith - receive our salvation and flourish as the grateful children of God. Amen.



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Church of the Palms

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