

# Living Church: Hearing God's Word

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] you're going to be working hard this morning you'll need your Bible there'll be different parts we'll be looking to because this morning we started a new series which we're calling Living Church and for the next eight weeks we're going to take a look at one aspect of church life that specifically relates to our gathering on a Sunday morning so when we meet together like this there are certain things that we do together at this stage they might be habit to you so when we come together we we do things like we sing we read the Bible we pray we have tea and coffee and we share communion and we listen to a talk from the Bible and it's easy as we come along week by week just to fall into a pattern and a habit and just almost go through the motions and not understand why we do what we do so why do we sing and why do we share why do we do these things together and so to help us get the most out of our Sunday morning gatherings we're going to look at one aspect each week and see why we do what we do and today we're going to start with what I think is the most important which is hearing God's word the sermon that's the bit that we're doing right now but before we do that we're going to pray let's pray together this comes from Isaiah 55 as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater 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 father as we hear your word may it achieve your purpose and may it accomplish in our lives only what is good for us may it lead us towards Christ and may it make us more like Christ amen well go to 2 Timothy then and we'll look at that passage together you'll see from our text that hearing God's word is central to the gathering of God's people look at chapter 4 verse 1 in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus so it's not just us who are here in the presence of God and Christ Jesus who are here with us who will judge the living and the dead and in view of his appearing and his kingdom

I give you this charge preach the word this is Paul's final letter that we know of to a young man called Timothy and Timothy has the responsibility of looking after a church in Ephesus and his last instruction his last big command to Timothy in his last letter is crystal clear in verse 2 I give you this charge preach the word be prepared in season and out of season correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction this is his last instruction and it is central to the life of this church until the Lord Jesus should return it doesn't inform us that we should be serving tea and coffee it doesn't say that we should sing or that we should play music or that we should pray not that any of those things are wrong we are simply reminded to make God's word central

Paul has already made this clear to Timothy you can look at his first letter just back a couple of pages chapter 4 of 1 Timothy and verse 13 where he encourages him again verse 13 of chapter 4 until I come devote yourself to the public reading of scripture to preaching and to teaching do not neglect your gift which was given to you verse 15 be diligent in these matters give yourself wholly to them in fact he is to teach this word of God to others to make sure that God's word is continually taught so in 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 1 it says you then my son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus and the things that you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others

God has clearly gifted those within his church who are able to teach God's word so that God's word remains central to the gathering of his people and as we'll see through our study this morning it is crucial to the growing and the building up of God's church now this may be nothing new to you and I hope it's not new however there is a danger that God's word can very easily become sidelined have a look at 2 Timothy chapter 4 back to our text and verse 3 he's reminding him to preach the word to keep it central because verse 3 the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine instead to suit their own desires they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say

what their itching ears want to hear they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths you see rather than hear what God has to say we prefer to hear what others have to say our natural hearing desire our ears are tuned not to hear

God's truth but to hear what we want to hear so you can see how easily it would be for God's word to get pushed to one side and it happens all the time I listened to a man called Joel Osteen recently he's pastor of one of the largest churches in America over 10,000 people in his church and he's the most watched on the God channel and at the beginning of his talks he holds up his bible in front of the congregation and they all repeat after him in a very proud way that the bible is the word of God and they all repeat after him and they all say how it's the truth and how it should be listened to then he puts it down and then he closes it and then he begins to speak to people about how they can have a better and a more successful life how they can be healthy and wealthy he's teaching what their itching ears want them to teach the problem is they're not hearing God's word they are hearing [ 8 : 14 ] Joel Osteen's words but we don't have to turn on the telly or go to another country I attended a church service here not too long ago not in this church somewhere else and part way through it was announced that we were now going to have the sermon and everything they said was very nice it was even quite funny but not once did they read from the bible and not once did they even refer to the bible we didn't hear god's word we heard the thoughts of somebody else so as a church we make the sermon the bible talk the main part of our gathering because our desire is to hear what god's word has to say not what others have to say and my job as you the people have called me to do is to teach you god's word that is what i do the primary part of what i do and it's your job to make sure that i teach god's word you have to be alert to it to make sure that what i'm saying is god's word and the way to make sure we keep god's word central is to give it priority so he says in verse 5 keep but you keep your head in all situations endure hardship do the work of an evangelist discharge all the duties of your ministry in other words even when nobody wants to hear god's truth even when people would prefer to listen to something else don't get sidetracked keep your head and keep god's word central but the question we need to ask is how do we hear god's word how do we hear his voice when we show up on a sunday morning like this do we expect to hear god speaking to us in an audible voice i could just sit down there and we could all sit and wait for god to speak is that what we think should happen or as i'm speaking right now am i saying what god is directly putting into my mind and i'm speaking it out is that what's happening how does god speak how do we hear him today well the answer comes in that little phrase at the beginning of chapter 3 verse 16 of 2 timothy do you see it there verse 16 he says all scripture is god breathed scripture is the bible the book we're reading from right now but what makes it different to every other book is it is god breathed that means that the bible is god's spoken word written down through human authors so when we're teaching god's word we're also hearing god's word peter adam who wrote a book about this whole subject explains it very helpfully like this it's on the screen god speaks to us today by the words he spoke long ago to them that's the prophets for us so that scripture is god's contemporary word for us today when we open up the bible when it is read and when it is taught we are hearing god speak to us we can break it down very simply like this in three ways first god's word spoken the very

first book of the bible introduces us to a god who speaks in genesis we read all about that but more importantly when god speaks he acts something happens when he speaks so we have this repeated phrase throughout genesis 1 and god said and it was so god said let there be light and there was light god speaks and something happens john stott another well-known speaker and author makes this helpful comment again it's on the screen for you god preaches and the world was made the word of god is proclaimed in heaven's pulpit and all comes to pass the preaching forms the universe the word preached is no empty word it accomplish what it pleases and never returns void to him who speaks so throughout the bible we're introduced to a god who speaks nearly four thousand times it says and god said or the lord said or something similar throughout the bible he is a speaking god and when he speaks things happen his words are powerful and effective but second god's word is written he's not only spoken his word but his words are written for us today people were told to write down god's word to preserve them for future generations for people like us so in exodus 34 27 it says then the lord said to moses write down these words and in jeremiah 30 verse 1 it says this is the word that came to jeremiah from the lord this is what the god of israel says write in a book all the words i have spoken to you this is how god communicates with us god has taken the initiative to make himself known and he has done this by speaking to us through human

authors like paul that we're reading from right now again a quote here it actually comes from our website this does not mean that god dictated mechanically to the authors rather god spoke his words through their words using their different personalities and style in such a way that their words were simultaneously his this is how god communicates and speaks to us so when it comes to god's word being preached the implication is clear when the bible is read and preached we are hearing the word of god god's word spoken is god's voice heard when it comes to the sermon to the time where we're hearing and opening up the bible and going through the books and the verses when someone preaches we hear god speak god is present in his words we meet him and we experience him in his words now that should radically change how we think of the sermon and it should change how we think when we actually open up the bible and begin to read it it's not johnny grant up the front sharing a few thoughts that he's had through the week it's not telling people my ideas that i had as i was sleeping and just kind of jotted them down and just well here's what i think no whoever preaches is speaking

with the authority of god and this is on the screen as well whoever preaches is speaking with the authority of god not their own authority but a borrowed authority which is the bible now that means we have to be very careful of people who claim that god speaks to them outside of scripture they say god spoke to me in an audible voice or through their thoughts and i've met people and i'm sure you've spoken to people and maybe you're somebody who said god said to me or god told me such and such what do you think about that will and i'm well to claim god has spoken to you is to give those words an authority equal to scripture you you you you you see all god's word is eternal god's spoken his word they've been written down they're for all generations and they are to believe to be believed and obeyed so any word that we claim that comes from god must equally be believed and obeyed by everybody because when god speaks it's a word for everybody that's what his word is now i'm not saying that god can't speak but what i'm wanting us to be very careful is the regularity by which some people will say they hear god speaking to them almost on an hourly and daily basis and i think that must be treated with great caution and care if we want to hear god speak to us in a contemporary way about our present situation and the life that we are in right now open up your bible and read it listen to the sermon being preached and apply it to your life that's why we make god's word central when the bible is read and taught we hear god speak directly to us so what should we expect to happen when we hear god's word being spoken to us well there are lots of different ways we should expect god to work but i think here are two primary ways first god's word creates life when we hear god's word we should expect the creation of life look look at 2 timothy chapter 3 verse 15 he says how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in christ jesus the hearing of god's word the scriptures brings salvation salvation is nothing less than a new creation a new beginning a new life let me show you a couple of places where we see this the first is in ezekiel chapter 37 the page is there on the screen you can look it up ezekiel chapter 37 here is one of god's prophets speaking to the people of israel and god shows them this vision and it's a vision of a great big valley full of dried up human bones scattered all over the place ezekiel

37 and verse 2 he led me to and fro among them and i saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley bones that were very dry he asked me son of man can these bones live i said oh sovereign lord you alone know then he said to me prophesy to these bones and say to them dry bones hear the word of the lord verse seven so i prophesied and as i was commanded and as i was prophesying there was a noise a rattling sound and the bones came together bone to bone and i looked and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them but there was no breath in them verse 10 so i prophesied as he commanded me and breath entered them and they came to life and stood up on their feet a vast army see in this vision god is showing to ezekiel and to us that we are like dead dry bones we're lifeless and the only way that we will come to spiritual life is by hearing god's spoken word god's word creates new life in christ and this whole theme is carried all the way through the bible and it's completed very well in first peter have a look at first peter again the page number is on the screen for you there first peter chapter one verse twenty three and if you'll note these verses we sung earlier on verse twenty three of first peter chapter one for you have been born again you have a new life there's a new creation not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of god for all men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field the grass withers the flowers fall but the word of the lord stands forever and this is the word that was preached to you you see peter here is describing how people come to faith in christ how we receive salvation physically he says we're born of perishable seed

we're born we live and we die that's the cycle of everybody but spiritually he says we are born again look at verse 23 by an imperishable seed the living and enduring word of God so so when we hear the word when we respond to it in faith we receive spiritual life which is nothing less than a new creation or the way Peter puts it here it's like we have been born again we start all over so what should we expect when we hear God's word nothing less than the creation of new life the bringing about of salvation in people that's why we're going to do the

Christianity explored course because it's only by hearing the word that people will come to faith and follow Christ not physical life but a spiritual life a new beginning and a fresh start so that's the first thing we should expect on hearing but the second one again go back to 2nd Timothy the second thing we should expect when we hear God's word is the transformation of life 2nd Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 it says all scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching rebuking correcting and training in righteousness so that the person the man or woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work the hearing of

[ 25 : 20 ] God's word again the scriptures will rebuke will correct and train so that we're equipped for every good work for the service that God has for us it is nothing less than not only the creation of life but it's about transforming our lives again let's see how God's word shows us this go to Hebrews chapter four it's only a couple of pages on in your bibles the pages on the screen for you there Hebrews chapter four here we get an insight into the transforming power of God's word Hebrew four verse twelve for the word of God is living and active sharper than any double edged sword it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit joints and marrow it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart nothing in all creation is hidden from

God's sight everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account it's saying here that the word is like a surgeon's scalpel in an operating theatre it cuts through all those outer layers through all the skin and all the muscle and the sinew and it divides and cuts deep till it exposes the heart you see we have an ability to cover up what we're really like and we can pretend that everything is really good with us and we can come and meet with other people and to everybody else we're fine but God's word has this power to be able to cut right through the exterior and get right to the very heart of our lives and expose and to show us what exactly we're really like in another place it says the Bible is like a mirror it shows us it reflects to us who we are as people now that's very painful to have that diagnosis for somebody to peer into our lives and to show to show us what we're like but he can transform us to be more like

Christ again we see this if you go back to first Peter where we were just now again just go a few more pages on the page number is on the screen first Peter just following on from the last verse verse 25 of chapter 1 Peter is still talking about the word of God the only difference here is he's begun to change his metaphor he was talking about the word being an imperishable seed and now at the beginning of chapter 2 he talks about the word like milk or spiritual milk so let's pick it up just before the beginning of chapter 2 he says and this is the word that was preached to you therefore rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander and all the other mess and the sin that's in our lives he says get rid of it all how are we going to do that verse 2 we are to be like newborn babies who crave pure spiritual milk so that by grow up in your salvation now that you have tasted that the

Lord is good the word is like milk to a baby and we've got plenty of them around at the minute haven't we and Reese and Ben here they're never going to grow unless they get milk it strengthens them and nourishes them and grows them and without it they're going to get weak and sick in the same way we need a healthy diet of God's word which is going to nourish us and he says look at verse three now that you've tasted that the Lord is good if you just taste it you will see how good it is drink drink drink it into your life eat it and it will help you deal with all those sinful habits and all those things in our life that are not like Christ it will change us and transform us in a very gentle and caring and wholesome way and make us into the kind of people God wants us to be because the word of God when it is heard transforms our life it trains us and equips us not physically but spiritually making us into the kind of people prepared for the service that he has for us so these are the things that we should expect you see it's crucial that we make God's word central to our gatherings on a Sunday in fact it should be at the center of all we do as a church and that's what we aim to do that's why we start our gatherings by reading from God's word that's why the songs that we sing are all based on God's word that's why we have teachers who right now are teaching the little ones from God's words and that's why we encourage us to meet together one to one through the week to

meet with people to when it is spoken when it is read when it is taught something happens just as [ 31 : 25 ] God spoke at the beginning and created the universe when he speaks your word into your life it creates a new life a new creation you come to Christ but not only that it transforms us to be more like Christ we cannot live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God make sure we keep it central and make sure it's the crucial part of your diet every week let's pray together our father god we thank you that we have your word written down for us in our language that we can understand thank you for the way in which it has been preserved over centuries and how today we have it in many different forms thank you that you've given to us people and teachers who can explain it thank you that you've given to us one another who can encourage us and help us in our reading thank you for that wonderful promise that when your word is spoken your voice is heard and you create life and you transform life so father help us as a church to make it central to all that we do and help us to make it central to our lives to our marriages and to our family we pray this in

Jesus name amen well we're not going to sing at this point