

God Speaking to us

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Date: 16 May 2010

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[0 : 00] I want us to turn this evening to the book of Psalms, the book of Psalms in the Old Testament at Psalm number 85.

The book of Psalms in the Old Testament and Psalm number 85. And I want to just look with you for a short time tonight at these words in verse 8.

Words in verse 8, Psalm 85 in the book of Psalms. Let me hear what God the Lord will speak. Let me hear what God the Lord will speak. And I want us to think together about a question which I was asked earlier on this week on the ferry, actually, on Tuesday.

I won't tell you who asked me the question, but it was a question that has stayed in my mind all week and something that I've tried to think about and tried to formulate some kind of answer on.

[1 : 13] The question is this. How do you know that God is speaking to you? How do you know that God is speaking to you?

Now, I don't believe there's anybody here tonight that doesn't understand that question. We may not understand it fully, but I don't believe there's anyone here this evening, not even the youngest, that doesn't understand the question.

I don't believe there's anybody here tonight that isn't interested in that question. Even if you're not a follower of Jesus yet, I don't believe that you are complacent about that question.

Maybe you are. I hope not. Because I don't think that there can be a more important question that you could ask. When you think about it, how do you know that God is speaking to you?

Well, my first reaction when I hear that kind of question is absolute thrill. Imagine everybody here this evening were burning in their hearts wanting to know the answer to that question.

[2 : 28] Going home this evening and praying to the Lord and reading their Bible and asking God to speak to them. If that were the case, I think we would be in a revival situation.

That's what you call revival. When everyone wants to know the Lord more and wants to walk with God and live with God and discover more about God.

It would be great to know this evening that everyone longed to have an answer to that question. It arises out of a hunger, I'm sure, in our hearts.

And I wish that more of us had that kind of hunger. It's a question that many Christians think about and contemplate and wrestle with.

And it's something that is definitely worth exploring. Because there's only one way of answering any kind of question that relates to God. And that is through the Bible. You have to go back to the Bible and ask, well, what does the Bible say?

[3 : 32] How do you know that God is speaking to you? But the question is not a straightforward one either. It's more complicated than perhaps we might imagine.

And it can't be answered in one short soundbite question or a sentence. There are also many wrong ideas about God speaking and what that means.

And ideas that can confuse us and lead you along all the wrong paths. For example, some people will tell you that because God in the past, in the Bible, spoke in unusual ways to people in the Bible, then we should expect the same God who spoke in a voice to his people that he should continue to speak in the same way.

Like with a voice. Audibly hearing a voice at night time or during the day or when we're in prayer with him or whatever. Some people would expect, they would suggest to you that, well, why not? And logically, if God spoke to people like Abraham and he spoke to Moses in the Old Testament, then why should I not? If my relationship with God is the same as theirs, why should I not expect him to audibly speak to me in a way that I could understand and that I can even hear?

[4 : 53] After all, God hasn't changed. His relationship hasn't changed with his people. Therefore, surely, I can expect the same today. Therefore, they say, as I live my Christian life, I should expect God to sometimes, perhaps not every day or every week, but sometimes speak to me in unusual ways, even in an audible voice.

Is that true? Is that true? Should we expect that kind of communication from God? And if not, then the question is, does God still speak at all?

Should I expect him at all to have anything to say to me? After all, look how tiny I am. I'm only a little mite in this vast world, which is a little mite in this vast universe.

And God, who created the universe and who knows the end from the beginning, why should he speak to me? Why should he speak to me? Just a little tiny, tiny dot, not even that, in the face of a vast universe.

It's an interesting question, isn't it? And I hope it's a fascinating question. I want to spend the next just 20 minutes just exploring the question of God speaking to us.

[6 : 06] First question is this, does God speak at all? Well, that's an easy one. It's so basic that I'm going to say this, that it is within God's very nature to speak.

It is part of God's being that he speaks. And the reason I know that is, I'm sure you'll have guessed by now, that's the reason we read the first chapter of Genesis.

God did everything by speaking. He spoke the world. He spoke light into existence from darkness. He spoke the world into existence from nothing.

He spoke the sun and the moon and the stars and the universe into existence and all their vastness from nothing. He spoke the vegetation and the beasts and the birds and the fish and the trees and the grass of the field and all of their majesty and glory and beauty and their complexity and their molecular structure and so on that the scientists will tell.

He spoke it all. He could have done it silently, I'm sure we could argue. He's God, he can do anything he wants to, but it is within his very nature that when he does something, he speaks.

[7 : 15] He does so to tell, to announce. But I think there's more to it than that, that it is within his very nature to speak. And we know, of course, the Bible tells us, as we saw this morning, that God is three as well as being one, he is three.

And there is communication within the Trinity between Father and Son and Spirit, eternal communication from the very beginning to the very end.

He has no beginning, he has no end. From eternity to eternity, God is the speaking God. It is within his very nature to speak.

But not only does he speak within himself, but he speaks to what he has created. We find this with Adam and Eve, who bear the image of God, that capacity to understand what God is saying to them.

The reason that you and I can communicate with one another is because God has given us that capacity. When I speak, you understand. When you speak, I understand. And we use language to convey and to engage with one another.

[8 : 26] That's all part of the likeness of God that God has given to us. And we have it from the very beginning. The first thing that God did when he made Adam and Eve was to speak to them and to tell them to go out and to subdue the earth and to manage the world that he had created for them.

They were to be caretakers and managers and pioneers and explorers. They were to go out and to use their minds and their brains. But he told them to do all that. He expressed to them what his will was in ways that they understand clearly and perfectly.

So a perfect world was one in which God spoke to Adam and Eve and they did. And they were happy, blissfully happy to do as God had told them to and to enjoy all that God had revealed to them by his word.

But I'll tell you what's the most amazing fact of all. The amazing, amazing fact is that God continued to speak even when Adam and Eve brought sin into the world through their rebellion against God. Now that defies what I would expect God to do. I would have expected that Adam and Eve having deliberately turned away from what God had said to them and introduced sin into the world, I would have expected God would have nothing more to say to them.

[9 : 54] And yet he did. And it wasn't just to punish them for what they had done and to evict them from the garden. God spoke to them in grace and gave them a promise that one day the seed of the woman would subdue the seed of the serpent and so on.

God had a plan of grace and hope and promise for this world which he announced and he spoke to them and all the way through the Old Testament. God continues to speak.

He does so with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He speaks to them and he calls them in grace calling Abraham out of the place where he lived to the promised land and so on and gathering to himself a kingdom and a people upon whom he would show grace and mercy and love which was of course the precursor to the Lord Jesus Christ and what he would bring in in the New Testament calling a people to himself.

And in the New Testament we're told that God hasn't stopped speaking. But this time he speaks. The letter to the Hebrews tells us that God who before time spoke through the prophets has now spoken to us through his son Jesus Christ.

God is incarnate. We saw that this morning. God coming down and made flesh. Jesus his son came to earth as his mouthpiece to deliver God's message.

[11:16] He who has seen me said Jesus has seen the father. And God has not stopped speaking. Even after Jesus was ascended to the right hand of the father the Lord speaks in various ways in the Acts of the Apostles.

He uses dreams and angels and voices and prophets to lead and to guide his people. So we've seen two things first of all. We've seen first of all that it is within the very nature of God to speak and to communicate.

And we've seen also that he continues to speak throughout the ages to his people. Leading them and guiding them in all his ways. These are the two foundations on which we're going to build what we have to say this evening.

But there are a number of other things that we want to say as well. And first of all that as the gospel spread the church, God's people, began to recognize a body of writings, a body of letters which were coming then into existence mostly by the Apostle Paul as authoritative.

And wherever the church would meet round about that time, 100 years A.D. or 200 years A.D. by that time those letters and those writings had been copied and passed on from church to church and place to place.

[12:44] And it was the same letters and the same writings as well as the four gospels. And they were being recognized by God's people at that time. And they were not just recognized as useful or performing some function but as authoritative.

And that is what we now know as the New Testament. And as the church grew and spread the church also was strengthened through reading and studying these letters, these writings that told of the birth and the life and the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And also as the Apostles would explain who Jesus was and why he came under the power of the Holy Spirit. That is what we call you put that together with the Old Testament which was already established at that time.

You put that to these two together and you have the Old and the New Testament what we call our Bible. Isn't it thrilling to know that we read the same Bible as the church read 200 years after Jesus was born?

It hasn't changed. Nothing more has been added to it. Nothing's been taken away from it. It's the same Bible. Because God's people everywhere have recognized you can't add anything to the Bible.

[13:56] It's so majestic and so powerful. It's the voice of God. So tonight without any hesitation I want to say this that when we open our Bible when we open its pages that is God speaking to us infallibly perfectly completely the Bible contains everything that we need to know about how we come to faith in Jesus which is the reason why I hope you read your Bible if you aren't a Christian tonight I hope I hope that you read your Bible the first thing I would do for you if you didn't have a Bible tonight is to give you a Bible and ask you to go and read it.

The best thing you can ever do for anyone who isn't a believer who doesn't have a Bible is to give them a Bible. And many as a person has been brought to faith in Jesus just by reading the Bible. There's something about it something peculiarly powerful about it as we make our way through it and as we read the extraordinary life of Jesus Christ and as we ask as we come as we open the pages and ask God to that if this truly is your word then speak to me and tell me and show me how truthful this Bible is.

So the Bible is God's infallible word and it has been the message of God to his people in every age not just to those who aren't believers but to those who are believers because in many senses as

soon as a person comes to faith in Christ he's only beginning and he then grows in his understanding of the Bible and begins to put it into practice more and more in his life begins to appreciate it more than ever before begins to search it and to try and wrestle with some of the difficulties in it and as they do so as we do so we discover more and more how much of an impact it has on our lives.

So how do we know God speaks to us? The Bible tells us how we must live how God wants us to live. Do you think that God would call you to himself to faith in Jesus Christ without continuing with you along your life and showing you and guiding you and leading you as to how to react in certain situations as to how to behave to what kind of lifestyle that you should have that he wants you to have?

[16:20] So you're asking tonight I wonder how to live my life. It's all here. It's all in the Bible. What we need to do tonight is to dig and to delve into the Bible and to explore it and to search it and as we search it we discover more and more of how we ought to the problem of course is that we discover more and more about ourselves.

It's like looking into a mirror and seeing our own blemishes and our own faults and failures. Well that's God speaking to us in the Bible and he's telling us look this is what I don't like.

This is something about this is an aspect of your life that I want you to change and I can change you. I can work within you because the Holy Spirit is in you now and he wants you to change and become more like Jesus Christ and that can be a very painful process.

Listening to the voice of God is not always easy sometimes God tells us the last thing we want us to hear we want to hear sometimes involves a discovery of ourselves that we've never discovered before long after we've been converted.

I'm still discovering things about myself that I never discovered before. Sometimes your discovery of yourself gets worse and you see yourself in terms of but then at the same time God always comes to you and says I can change you.

[17:46] I can do in you and for you exceeding abundantly more than you can ask or even think. So don't be afraid of discovering yourself in the Bible. It's there because God lovingly wants you to know how you can live for him and how you can be more like him.

He does. He's not the kind of person that tells us just what we want us to what we want to hear about ourselves. He doesn't do that. He tells us the truth about ourselves. So let's read the Bible and let's read it correctly.

Let's use our understanding of what we are reading. And ask the Lord to give you an understanding as well. Now that doesn't mean that you have to have a theology degree to understand the Bible.

That's not the case at all. The Bible is the most amazing book. It can be picked up by ordinary people and understood. I'm not saying that it can be understood in all its complexity.

No one can understand the Bible in all its complexity. Not even the PhD in theology can understand the Bible in all its complexity. But isn't it amazing that the very Bible that PhDs and professors wrestle with trying to understand is the same Bible that an ordinary person is picking up tonight and it means the world to that person and he's reading it with understanding.

[19:08] He's marveling at it. He loves it. He's sitting tonight and he's loving every word and God is speaking to that person in the Bible in a plain and simple manner.

The Bible is not just for clever people. It's for all kinds of people. It's for young people. It's for older people. It's for clever people.

It's for the not so clever. And that's why tonight it's the best possession you could possibly have.

How much do we use that Bible? How many of us tonight are going to at some point go home and open it and read a chapter and ask how is God speaking to me in this chapter?

What's God saying to me? Now again we have to be careful because we can use the Bible in the wrong way. We can use the Bible almost like a kind of roulette wheel.

And by that I mean the kind of person who wants to hear God's voice wants to know what God's saying to him and just kind of opens the Bible at random and just looks at the first words he comes to.

[20:22] Now I don't know if you've ever done that. When I was younger I used to do that sometimes. You do a lot of foolish things when you're young. And I had this idea I'm sure that many many Christians have had this idea you know that if you're looking to know the answer to prayer for example you're praying about something and you want an answer right away oh we're so impatient we want answers right away.

That's one of the lessons that God always teaches us that you can't have answers right away. You've got to give them time. God's time is not our time but we do we want answers right away. So we open the Bible at random and we say right first thing I come to right here we go. And of course you'll remember the famous incident of the man who did that and who was praying over something he wanted to know the will of God and he opened the Bible right away and he stuck a pin in the page and the page said and Judas went and hanged himself. So he took the pin out of the page and he said no that can't be right. So he closed the Bible again he prayed again and he opened it and he put the pin in the page and it said go do thou likewise. Isn't that awful?

That's what happens when you use God's word superstitiously like a roulette wheel taking a chance. That's not guidance. That's not the way that God guides at all.

[21 : 39] He doesn't guide in that kind of superficial type of way and I know we've all done it. I've done it and I'm sure you've done it as well. Let's grow out of these things. We can be very immature as Christians but the Lord's will is that we grow out of our immaturity and we grow on to better things.

We have to read the Bible correctly and we have to also read it in context. You don't just take a verse out of context. You don't just look at one verse.

I know that God can speak in that way and God has said he's done many things through individual verses but the Bible is a whole book to be understood as a whole story from start to finish.

Genesis, Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden all the way through to Revelation and he wants us to come to know that whole story that takes place over thousands of years and God's plan and purpose throughout his people with his people and eventually to bring Jesus into the world and for him to lay down his life on the cross to rise again and to ascend to be with the Father and to come again at the end of time.

And that's the context in which we're always to read the Bible to understand it in its proper place. But as we do so make no mistake we have God's message in our hands.

[23 : 01] And we're to remember also that we have that if you're following Jesus tonight we have the Holy Spirit to help us. Our constant inseparable companion is the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised his disciples that he would send his Holy Spirit to be with his people but also to be in them. And the Bible also goes on to tell us in Romans chapter 8 that the Holy Spirit communicates with us in a strange kind of inexplicable way in which he bears witness to us or with us.

What that means is that he takes the words that we find and he impresses them upon our hearts sometimes more than others. I know that there are times when we read our Bibles and it doesn't appear that God is saying anything particular to us.

There are other times when things appear to jump out of the page at us. Why is it that that happens? Well it's the Holy Spirit working in us and giving us the understanding and the love and the longing and the hunger and the desire to do God's will and to hear what God says to us.

Sadly very often the question is not how do I know that God is speaking to me but am I prepared to listen and do what he says when he does speak to me and that's the question I want to put to all of you tonight.

[24 : 31] Are you really concerned to know when God is speaking to you and how to hear and understand God's voice or or are you of the kind of mind that just wants to refuse it and walk away not wanting to hear what God says to us.

Everything then is rooted in the Bible. It contains everything we need as to how to live the Christian life. Nothing is missing. All we have to do tonight is to start digging and the more you dig the more you discover and the more you discover the more you need to change and to put into practice what he says to you.

Now I want to reiterate this in order to discourage you from the kind of thing I mentioned at the beginning where we expect to hear voices from the Lord. Now I don't deny for a moment that there are there may be occasions when God does unusual things.

I'm not going to restrict who who am I to restrict God in anything that he does. So I'm not denying that there may be occasions and when I read history books and particularly Christians who lived many years ago and who were much more spiritually minded than I am and for most of us here and who lived in an age where people knew prayer as we do not know it today I know that things happened in those days and I believe that things happened in those days that I can't explain and

God did communicate I believe with people in unusual ways but does that mean here's my question does that mean that ordinarily I should expect God to speak to me tonight in a voice does that mean that when I pray to the Lord I should expect that God should answer that prayer in a voice that I can hear and I can respond to my answer to that is no

I've never heard a voice that doesn't mean anything that may mean that I'm just not as spiritual as other people but I've never heard a voice my question is I'm not even sure if I want to hear a voice if I did hear a voice I think I would ask how do I know that it's God's voice that I'm hearing the Bible tells me Paul says that the angel can make himself appear like an angel of light sorry the devil I should say go back to the beginning the devil can make himself appear as an angel of light by the same token the devil can make himself sound as an angel of light or even take on the voice of God himself so I reckon if I was to hear a voice tonight and I say this with all reverence that my first question would be asked how can I be sure that this is God's voice it would not be an infallible way of God communicating to me

[27 : 29] I think we also have to bear in mind when we go back to the Bible and when we hear of God speaking to the likes of Abraham or Moses and so on or the prophets these times were few and far between for example there were many years between God speaking to Abraham on one occasion and Abraham on the next occasion he had to wait years and years before he heard God's voice again I hope I wouldn't have to wait years before hearing God's voice and I thank God tonight that I can hear God's voice every day as soon as I open my Bible God is speaking to me the truth is that God communicated to his people in a day when they didn't have their Bible we do we have now and their problem is we don't make as much use of it and we're not as excited about it as we ought to be the Bible is God's living word and it contains everything we need and so tonight you can go home and you can open your Bible and you can ask now what is

God saying do you believe that tonight do you believe that that this is God's word to me his message to me is in the Bible and as we read it from day to day and from week to week and month to month as we go through it and I would suggest that that you do don't just read random chapters and verses here and there but that you go through a whole book in order to understand it in the context you'll know you know with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit it's amazing how much God impresses his mind and his will upon you as you read God's word I've experienced that so many times in my life sometimes it's uncanny how for one reason I start a book say for example if I read the gospel of John I start in John chapter 1 and go make my way through and events in my life now I didn't plan it this way but events in my life are such that I'm praying about something and as I'm reading the gospel of John it's strange how the Lord impresses his mind and his will upon you through what you are reading and through your understanding of it and I believe that's the mature way rather than listening to voices that is the mature

Christian way of listening to the voice of God and of course the next thing is the place of prayer and perhaps it's a time to remind ourselves of what we're doing when we're entering into God's presence in prayer we're entering into communion with God that special fellowship in which we come together with God for too many of us it's just a routine it's something that we do because we feel it's the right thing to do but do you stop and think I'm about to enter into the presence of God I'm about to speak to him and it's like I'm speaking to my best friend it's like I'm speaking to my wife or my brother or sister it's he's right there he's right there in front of me Moses was known for his speaking to God face to face he was the friend of God that's what we are in Jesus we've been brought into fellowship with the

Lord do we know that do we do we live it in our prayer or is our prayer a kind of a dull kind of a routine in our lives well stop stop tonight and ask the Lord to change all that to revolutionize the way that you pray and to remind you of what you're doing when you come into his presence and ask you to give you a real desire to spend time with the Lord and as you do so and as we really launch out into the deep you know what God does he actually places desires and longings in your heart and there's no other place from where this could come up but God himself and this is his way of leading us and guiding us and our thoughts in our souls what about when we're in a crisis what about when we those times in our lives and they don't happen very often where we need to make a major decision there's a choice to make and we naturally we want to know what the Lord wants us to do which choice to make of that and it could be a job it could be a place to stay it could be a choice between staying or going it could be a choice of who to marry whether I get engaged to a girl or not or whatever and you're wondering how is the Lord saying to me in all of this

how do I know for all of us there are major decisions that we make at some points in our lives and as Christians we want to make sure I hope that God is at the center of these decisions and we want to obey him more than anything else we want to obey him and we're anxious about that well first of all I believe that we shouldn't be anxious that if we're living as God wants us to live and if we are asking him and praying about this God will do his will in us if we surrender and yield our will to the Lord we don't need to worry why are we worrying why do we worry about whether or not we'll make the right choice

[33 : 01] God's in control he's in control of your life he's the one who's brought you to be a Christian he's brought you to see your need of a saviour he's done everything for you he's done in you and for you more than you can ask or even think and you can look back over your life and everything has been provided you can see the stone that Samuel put up Ebenezer up until now the Lord has helped us why is he going to change now do you think the Lord who has provided every single step along the way do you think that when you come on to a crisis point in your life he's going to somehow abandon you and say you're on your own of course he's not and sometimes you just have to make the choice you make it prayerfully you make it for the best reason or what you believe are the best reasons you leave it to the Lord and sometimes it's only years afterwards that you discover you made the right decision he's not going to come and appear in some form and say this is what you do he doesn't operate that way you have to leave it in the hands of the

Lord and you have to believe that the Holy Spirit who started a good work in you is continuing and this choice and this crisis is the crisis that God has led you into and that he will see you through all of that and there are also other strange unusual occurrences in a Christian life that perplex you and that leave you kind of frozen to the spot you don't know what to do you don't know where to turn you don't know what decision to make and you don't know how to get out of some situations that the Lord leads you into well leave it to the Lord believe that the Lord is continuing to bring about his will and he's never ever going to let you down if he has saved you in the first place he that spared not his own son but gave him up for us all how shall he not offer also freely with him give us all things seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you do not worry you just give yourself to the Lord you just place yourself in the Lord's hands and God will take you through it he'll take you through from day to day he'll you'll see it you'll be able to look back and you'll say blessed be God who has done in me and for me more than

I can ask or even think just one more thing because the time has gone whatever we make of this question and I hope that what we've said tonight it's only scratched the surface I know it's only perhaps it's given rise to more questions than answers that's fine sometimes that's the way in which we then deepen our knowledge of God's word but we've explored the question in any case it's a fascinating question and one which is which leads to a greater discovery of God but I'll tell you this there's one thing that God is saying to all of us tonight particularly to those of you who haven't yet come to that place of commitment and faith in Jesus Christ or perhaps there are those who you believe that you had at one time and you've kind of wandered away and you just don't know where you are now the Lord is speaking to you there is no question whatsoever you know some people think that they can make mistakes and leave themselves outside of

God's will and you think that because you've made a mistake in your life God has nothing more to say to me he's not speaking to me well you know that's the way we act with one another God doesn't treat us like that God's mercies are endless at least while we are in this world God's mercy means that he has still something to say to you to bring you to draw you to lovingly invite you once again or for the first time to trust in him and to experience his grace and his love in Jesus Christ please don't say to me but what about the elect if I'm not in the elect God is not speaking to me that's not your business what God is saying to you tonight is I am the way and the truth and the life he who comes to me he that no one comes to the father but by me he says

I am the resurrection and the life he who follows me though he were dead will not walk in darkness he says I am the light of the world he who follows me will not walk in darkness that is what he says to us tonight and you know what he says to you tonight he really means God never says anything without meaning it there's no two-facedness in God when he invites you into his kingdom it's because he wants you to come in he wants you to see his glory he wants you to rise to newness of life he wants you to be forgiven and to come to Jesus that is his personal message tonight from the living and the true God to you to his folk heal speak peace and there is no peace outside of Jesus there's no such thing as peace anywhere else come and come to peace with

[38 : 40] God this evening to discover what that peace is by listening by hearing God's word and by coming to Jesus Christ and when you come to Jesus you'll find a whole life of listening to the voice of God and following the voice of God and obeying God's voice God never leads us along the wrong path he never leads us to death and destruction but he'll lead you to life everlasting life abundant life God doesn't want anything but the very best for you come to him and come to him tonight let's pray our father in heaven bless your word to us this evening and may we have ears to hear what you have to say to us may we be given a real willingness to turn away from what we know is sinful and destructive and harmful and to turn to the one who can forgive us and cleanse us and give us a new life forgive us then we pray and speak to each one of us and as you speak may we be changed by your power in
Jesus name amen