

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Tuning In To The Voice Of God

by Dan Trygg

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son”

Hebrews 1:1-2

“...I spoke to you, ... but you did not hear, and I called you but you did not answer”

Jeremiah 7:13

“Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.”

John 8:43-44

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me...”

John 10:27

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven?”

Hebrews 12:22-25

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

James 4:7-8

If there is anything that stands out, as one reads the Bible, it is that God is *not* some disinterested, far off Being. He did not just create the world, set it in motion, and then move on to other things. The god of the deists is not at all the God we read about in the scriptures. **Yahweh is very much interested in the lives of people.** He repeatedly tells us that He is *not* a God who is far off. He is a God who is everywhere present, conscious of the details of our individual lives, and interested in having a friendly, personal partnership with each of us (Psa. 139). **A key aspect of having a relationship or interactive partnership with someone is that there must be *communication* between the parties involved. Not surprisingly, we find that a key characteristic of God is that He is a Communicator.** As the writer to the Hebrews observed, He communicated to people of old “in many portions and in many ways”. This is difficult to translate into English. In Greek, only two words are used, coupled together by the word, “and”. These are adverbs, telling us more about *how* God spoke, i.e., “multi-portioned-ly” and “multi-method-ly”. As you can see, this is very awkward English, so we resort to prepositional phrases to attempt to communicate the same idea. We even have to modify the verb to attempt to bring it into English. It is a participle, an “-ing” word, in the Greek, in this first phrase. It would literally be God “speaking (at a point in time)”. A different adverb is used to communicate the aspect of past time, “formerly, long ago”; or even, “for a long time, already”. In this sentence, all of this is to set up a contrast or comparison with the fact that “upon the last of these days He spoke to us in a Son” (vs. 2). Then, to make sure we do not misunderstand him, or suppose that he could be talking about just any person, he adds, “whom He appointed heir of all things, by means of whom He made the ages. Who, being the outshining of His (God’s) glory and the exact-representation of His substantial-nature, bearing all things by the word of His power, making purification of the sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty in the high places.” Only one person in history could remotely fit all those descriptive phrases, Jesus of Nazareth! But, I digress. The point is that **God is a “speaking” Being, one who has communicated with people throughout history. He revealed truth in *bits* (“many portions”) by a diversity of communication *methods* (“many ways”). The *strongest, clearest, most objective* revelation was in Jesus, His Son.**

Jesus was *not* God’s last word, however. He is still “the speaking God”. The passage from Hebrews 12 communicates that truth. Verse 25 warns us not to refuse “the One speaking”. This is a *present* dangerous reaction to a *present-speaking* God. **The writer uses the wayward resistance of Israel at the time of Moses to remind us to “Watch”, in order that we might not refuse or disregard “the One speaking”.** The author reminds us of the dire consequences that came upon those who had refused God’s counsel in the past. **They did not escape the hardships or judgments which followed their departure from God’s directives. Neither will we, if we refuse to listen.** Again, the focus here is not just refusing to listen to the objective revelation of Jesus’ work on the cross. Of course, those who refuse to listen and respond to *that* are still lost in their sins. The writer is not addressing that situation, however. He is writing to Christians. He is admonishing them to go on with God. Some of them are thinking of going back. That is not an option, not any more than the Israelites could walk back through the Red Sea. They either could *go on* with God, or they could *die* in the wilderness. The same is true for us. **We either go on with “the speaking God”, ...or we will live a powerless, self-absorbed existence in a spiritual desert, until we die.** God did not save us to live in the desert. He saved us to bring us into a fuller, deeper, more vibrant relationship with Him, one that expresses the life of God to a watching world. **God is *not* static. He didn’t send Jesus, and then leave us to ourselves.** The god of the deists is *not* the God of the Bible, remember? **He gave us the Holy Spirit to empower and fill us with His life, so that we could go on with Him to accomplish His purposes in the world.**

It is interesting to see what the danger really is, here. The word translated as “refuse” or “reject” is the same word as used in Luke 14:18,19. Some have called this the “Parable of the Great Dinner”. A wealthy man threw a big dinner, and he had invited many. When it was all prepared, he sent his slave to tell those who had been invited to come to the meal. “But they all alike began to *make excuses...*” The word from Hebrews 12:25 is this same word, literally, “to beg off, to make excuses.” Hebrews 12:25 then says, “**Watch, lest you *make excuses from the One speaking...***” What is the context? Putting aside the encumbrances and sins that get us all tangled up, so that we could run with endurance the race set before us, ...accepting the discipline of God, who is training us up into holiness, ...pursuing peace with all people, ...taking responsibility to watch out for our brothers and sisters that no one would be lacking the grace of God, that no one becomes poisoned by bitterness, or that no one live in sexual immorality and godlessness and disregard their birthright in Christ. *If we sell out for selfish pleasure, and waste our lives, we cannot go back and reclaim what was lost.* The calling and standard of the New Covenant is *higher* than that of the Old. If those in the wilderness did not escape when they refused Moses, how much less will we escape who turn away from God who warns us from heaven? Note the parallelism in this statement, **to “refuse” or “make excuses” is the same as to “turn away from” God.** This sounds so *blatant*, so *harsh*, ...yet, when you think about it, it is *the truth*. **If we “make excuses” or “beg off from” obeying the voice of the Holy Spirit, haven’t we *disregarded and turned away from His prompting*?** We don’t like to think of ourselves as being *disobedient*, but if we don’t do what He tells us, isn’t that what we are? We are not obeying the voice of the Lord. When the call for service comes, instead of rising to that voice, we “begin to make excuses”. It is inconvenient to us to obey, right now. “Please, consider me excused.”

This is not a new problem. God has been calling and speaking to people throughout history. Even those who are considered to be His people have turned a deaf ear toward Him. Jeremiah 7 says that God spoke to Israel, even called out to them, but they did not give heed or answer Him. Their hearts were hard toward God. Their ears were dull. In John 8, Jesus asks the rhetorical question of His opponents, “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot hear My word.” They could not hear, because they were not aligned with Christ, born from above. They had their own selfish agenda. They were aligned with the devil. They did not live in the truth. By contrast, those who are really Jesus’ sheep do hear His voice, and follow Him (Jn. 10). **If we are His, we *do* have the capacity to hear His voice. Are we *tuning in*? Are we *responding to Him* as Lord, or are we making excuses?**

We have lost or misunderstood the nature of the Christian walk. We have turned it into a moralism, which we choose to apply or live by as we see fit. Most Christians are still “trying to be good”. The problem is that we are in charge. The initiative for our so-called Christian behavior comes from *us*, ...from *our* heads. **Most Christians are not expecting or looking for communication from God**, so they live as best they can (or *want* to) without any reference to a living, active, present-speaking Master. **They do not look to Him to direct them, ...or, if they do, they do not know how to recognize His promptings.** The Christian life was never meant to be a moralistic philosophy. It was never meant to be a walk of self-discipline, or even religious rituals. **The Christian walk was meant to be a living partnership with a personal God who will prompt and speak to us, and who expects us to communicate with Him, as well.** He is the Master, and we are His servants. He loves us, and walks with us through the challenges and opportunities of life. **He will bring opportunities for us to serve Him by serving others.** He will reveal to us what He is doing, and He will prompt us to reach out to help or speak to them. **Our place is to respond to what He is initiating in us, or in that other person, or in the situation.** These opportunities are often very specific and temporary. **It is important that we act *when* God directs us, or we may miss out on the opportunity, entirely.** It may not come again. **Making excuses, or “begging off” from an opportunity is the same as *turning away from God’s leading*.** It is asserting *your* agenda over *His* direction. This is disobedience. This is sin. **It dishonors and disregards the voice of the Holy Spirit.** Talking the talk is *not* the same as walking the walk. It doesn’t matter what we *say* we are going to do, ...either in prayer to God, or before other people. What really counts is what we *do*, when we are called up for service. Remember the parable of the two sons? Which one did the will of his father? The one who DID the will of his father, ...the one who *obeyed* (Matt. 21:28-31).

How do we tune in to the voice of God? First, we must be convinced that this is *real*, that God *does* want to speak to us. **Secondly, we must *confess* that we have been dull of hearing,** or have been disregarding His voice. **Third, *submit* to God** (Jam. 4:7). The word means to “order yourself under” God. Tell Him that you recognize Him as your King and Master, and that you *want* to be led by Him, so that you can effectively serve Him. God will give grace to those who humble themselves before Him. **Fourth, *draw near* to God.** He is holy, so this involves cleaning up your life, investing in your spiritual walk, and dedicating your heart and attention to Him. **Fifth, don’t be surprised if God speaks to you in “bits” or in unusual ways.** He may just tell you one step. **Sixth, obey the prompting.** You will fine tune your discernment, and strengthen your faith, as you step out and see God at work.