

AlbertMohler.com

Has Any People Heard the Voice of God Speaking . . . And Survived? Part Two

In the book of Deuteronomy, we meet the speaking God. "Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, and survived?" Mercy and grace meet here. This is, in its own way, a proto-gospel. Christopher Wright makes this comment concerning what happened at Sinai, saying what really mattered there was not that there had been a theophonic manifestation of God, but that there had been a verbal revelation of God's mind and will. Sinai was a cosmic audiovisual experience, but it was the audio that mattered. It is the audio that matters, for God has spoken. In light of that, Dr. Mohler suggests several realities that should frame our thinking as Christians.

Tuesday, September 12, 2006

In the book of Deuteronomy, we meet the speaking God. "Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, and survived?" Mercy and grace meet here. This is, in its own way, a proto-gospel. Christopher Wright makes this comment concerning what happened at Sinai, saying what really mattered there was not that there had been a theophonic manifestation of God, but that there had been a verbal revelation of God's mind and will. Sinai was a cosmic audiovisual experience, but it was the audio that mattered. It is the audio that matters, for God has spoken.

If God has spoken, let me suggest several realities that should frame our thinking as Christians. First, if God has spoken, then we do know. And what we know is the highest and greatest knowledge any human ear can ever hear. No human ear deserves to hear God's voice, but by His grace, we hear it and we survive. But having heard it, we cannot feign ignorance. We cannot act as if we do not know. Francis Schaeffer, for instance, said that for the Christian who understands the doctrine of revelation, there is no real epistemological crisis. There is only a spiritual crisis. All that remains is whether we will obey.

Thus there is a firm basis to what we do here, because we know. We have an authority by which we preach, and an authority by which we teach. In every class, in every course, and in every church, what is spoken is spoken because we have heard. We are not making this up as we go along! And because we have heard, we cannot feign ignorance, and we are thus accountable for the hearing.

Secondly, if God has spoken, we know only by mercy. That is a good reminder for anyone who studies theology. There can be no pride in the knowledge of God, because everything we know about Him, we know by mercy. Carl F. H. Henry describes this so beautifully when he speaks of revelation as God's willful disclosure, wherein He forfeits His own personal privacy so that His creatures might know Him. We have no claim upon God. There is no necessity for Him to forfeit His own personal privacy.

Moreover, there is no way, as the Bible makes clear over and over again, that we could ever figure Him out on our own. He must speak, and He has. Dr. Henry said this in the second volume of *God, Revelation and Authority*: "If divine revelation in terms of speech means anything, it implies among other things that God need not have thus disclosed Himself. God might indeed have remained silent and incommunicative in relation to His creatures. His revelational speech to mankind is not an inescapable or inevitable reality. It is instead a demonstration of His own character. It is not to be likened to the mathematically quite predictable spurting of the geyser Old Faithful. Instead, like an enigmatic weather pattern, His performance cannot be charted in advance and in crucial ways. It is once for all rather than merely sporadic. Even God's extended and ongoing speech in general or universal revelation is moment by moment, precept by precept, a matter of voluntary divine engagement and addressed to mankind that carries ever and on the utmost urgency." God

mercifully lets His people hear. It is all by mercy, and thus intellectual pride is the enemy of any true theological knowledge. There is nothing we can figure out. There is nothing we can discover. There is no “aha” moment where, in some theological laboratory, a new element is discovered. We know by grace and mercy.

Third, if God has spoken, then we too must speak. We preach and teach and speak, because God has spoken. Because God has spoken, we dare not remain silent. There is a task here; there is an urgency here. And so we teach and we preach and we speak, because we are to be the speaking people of a speaking God. The people of God are not to be marked by their silence, but by their speech. There is a command here to preach, of course, and a command here to teach. In Deuteronomy six, Israel is reminded of the responsibility of parents to teach children. Throughout the very fabric of Scripture, the teaching mandate is a constant. And of course, for the church, it is just as clear. As Paul writes in 2 Timothy chapter four, *kerusso ton logon*, preach the word! We are not just to have heard it, but we are to teach it and to preach it and to share it.

The importance of this was made clear even in the Old Testament. In Nehemiah eight, for example, Ezra and his colleagues read the text aloud and then explained its meaning to the congregation. So we are to set it out and make it plain, because if God has spoken, we too must speak.

Fourth, if God has spoken, then it is all about God, and it is all for our good. You see, God does speak words of judgment in the Scripture, and God does speak words of warning. There are hard words in Scripture, but it is all for our good! God spoke words of warning to Israel in order that Israel might hear the warnings and obey the word, and not suffer the inevitable consequences of disobedience. Every single word of Scripture is for our good. That is why, even in this chapter of Deuteronomy, we are told that no one should add to these words, nor take away from them. Every word is for your good, like medicine for the soul, or food for the body.

Fifth, if God has spoken, it is for our redemption. When we think of the work of God in our salvation, we focus of course in the culmination and the fulfillment of God’s saving work in the accomplished work of Christ on the cross. But to read the Scripture is to understand that God has been a redeeming, saving God from the very beginning. Taking Israel out of Egypt was redemption. Keeping Israel alive, even in the wilderness, was redemption. Speaking to Israel and letting Israel hear and survive was redemption. Jonathan Edwards well understood this. Speaking of this passage, he says, “This was quite a new thing that God did towards this great work of redemption. God had never done anything like it before. ‘Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire and live? Or has God assayed to go and take Him a nation that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt?’ This was a great advancement of the work of redemption that had been begun and carried out from the fall of man. It was a great step taken in divine providence towards a preparation for Christ’s coming in the world, in working out His great and eternal redemption. For this was the people from whom Christ was to come, and now we see how that plant flourished that God had planted in Abraham.” God allowing Israel at Horeb, and thereafter, to hear and to survive, was a part of His work of redemption, and revelation is for our redemption.

We need to remember that. So often, even evangelical Christians speak of revelation as if it were something that witnesses to redemption. Yet we must keep in mind that revelation, in and of itself, is also a part of God’s work of redemption. For without revelation, we would not know. We would have no clue. But by God’s gracious revelation of Himself, we do know.

