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

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If God has spoken, then the highest human aspiration must be to hear what the Creator has said. Revelation is necessarily a personal matter. To hear the voice of the Lord God is not merely to receive information, but to meet the living God. Last week, we considered five realities that should frame our thinking in light of the fact that God has spoken. Here are three more.

Sixth, because God has spoken, we must obey. This is not a word submitted for our consideration. The living God allows us to hear His voice from the fire and survive. He has demands to make of us, as Creator speaks to creature. And in the giving of the Torah, and the entire body of law, there is the requirement of obedience. This is repeated over and over again. It is stated in the form of a positive principle: Israel is told, "If you obey, you will be blessed and you will live. You will prosper in the land that I am giving you." The demand of obedience is also stated in the negative: "If you disobey, you will be cursed. You will bear my wrath. The nations of the world will cast you out. You will go out before them, to be taken as their exiles. You will be cast out of the land."

The demand of obedience is very clear, and it is central to Deuteronomy chapter four. Even as the Lord God through Moses is preparing His people to enter the promised land by reciting again the law, He says to them, "It is about obedience. I'm not giving you mere information. I'm not letting you hear my voice for your intellectual stimulation. It is not so that you will have an epistemological advantage over the pagan peoples around you! It is so that you would obey."

Seventh, if God has spoken, we must trust. "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." We know that song, or at least some previous generations knew that song. But it really is a matter of trust, a hermeneutic of trust, an epistemology of trust, a spirituality and theology of trust. If God has spoken, we trust His Word because we trust in Him. Woe unto anyone who would sow seeds of mistrust or distrust of the Word of God. For to fail to trust this word is, as Israel was clearly told, to fail to trust in God Himself. Paul Helm, one of the most faithful Christian philosophers of the day, points to trust as the new apologetic. He refers to an apologetic of trust, understanding that in the end, the character of God is what finally anchors not only our epistemology, but our redemption and our hope.

Eighth, if God has spoken, we must witness. Deuteronomy chapter four has a counterpart chapter in Deuteronomy 30. There, as Moses now prepares to die, the Lord speaks through him and says, "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it that we may observe it?' Nor is it beyond the sea that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it that we may observe it?' But the Word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it. See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land which you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not

prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life. Choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants by loving the Lord your God and obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him.”

Now consider Romans 10. The Apostle Paul refers to this very text. Romans 10:8 reads: “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? How will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!’ However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the word of Christ.”

So faith comes from hearing—hearing and yet surviving. This too explains why we are here. Because in the very formula and logic of Romans chapter ten, somehow we heard. Not one of us was at Horeb, but yet we have heard. Someone had to tell us. God spoke, and someone had to speak to us. Therefore there is, as the Word of God makes so very clear, the mandate to go and to tell. If God has spoken, then we do know. If God has spoken, then we are accountable. If God has spoken, it is by mercy and for our good, and if God has spoken, it comes with a commission and a command, which makes a difference in the life of a Christian.

The difference for the church is that we understand what it means to gather together as the ones who by the grace and mercy of God have heard. The church gathers under the authority of the Word. It makes a difference also for a seminary. We are not making this up. Our task is not to go figure out what to teach. Our task is not to figure out where to find meaning in life. It is to be reminded continually that we have heard the voice of God speaking from the fire and have survived, and thus we teach.

This is the mercy of God—to hear and yet survive. It is the mercy by which we live every day and experience every moment and evaluate every truth claim and judge every worldview and preach every sermon. We work and we live under that mercy. One cannot help connecting Deuteronomy 4—the experience of Israel hearing the Lord God speak from the midst of the fire and yet surviving—with Hebrews chapter one, which in the prologue tells us that God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers and the prophets in many ways, has spoken to us in these last days by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom also He made the world. We are here because God has spoken, not only in the fire, but in the Son, in whose name we are gathered and in whose name we serve.

