

**Hearing God's voice (2): What is God saying? February 7th 2021.
Genesis 24 (whole chapter);**

The man watched, silent. "Was this God's answer? Had God made his trip a success or not?" That was the servant in Genesis. Sent by Abraham, he seeks to know what God is saying.

Abraham had heard God's voice, calling him to go to Canaan, and God had promised that a nation will come from his line; that he will have a son. Miraculously, this takes place, as Sarah give birth to Isaac.

Now comes the next matter, for the building of "a great nation", requires that Isaac has a wife and children.

This is the second of three parts on 'Hearing God's Voice.'
We explore 6 ways to consider if God is speaking...

(V1-10) In these first 10 verses, we see 3 ways about how God may speak. **Necessity, Word of God, Desires.**

Abraham is old, and alone, for Sarah has died. He has one last task to perform, to arrange his son's marriage. It sounds like a last will and testament. He is not sure if he will be alive when the servant returns. This belief, forces him to act now.

The first step in this process – which ends in Isaac and Rebekah being guided to each other – is **necessity**. Necessity was what drove Abraham to send his servant, and this sending, was the start of God's guidance of the servant. God can use *necessity* to guide us in our decisions, that lead us into his will. And, *necessity* can also lead others to make decisions that will bring others into another aspect of the will of God.

Hudson Taylor is known as one of the missionary greats of the c19th. From 1853-60 he served in China as a young man. When he returned to UK. He was involved in the project to translate the NT into Chinese. He wrote also a book called 'China's Spiritual Needs and Claims'. In it he described the spiritual need in China. His nephew said:

"as Taylor mediated on the book, as he paced his room dictating its pages to his wife, he felt 'God's sigh in the heart of the world'. As he thought and considered, the fire burned. The sense of China's need grew and overwhelmed him; and at a same time a consciousness of God's willingness to do greater things possessed his soul...

Day by day, it became increasingly clear that God was speaking. The current British Revival was a revelation of God's power to bless, while a million a month dying in China without God was its appalling contrast."

His nephew goes on to say, that the existing agencies were unable to become involved in China. So this lack of success led Taylor to the need for a new missionary agency to be founded. It was the China Inland Mission – the father of modern days missions.

The first step began with necessity – the need of the Chinese. **Necessity** that burned in his soul. A necessity that was communicated to others and it so caught many souls, that thousands over the years went as missionaries to China.

The second way: **the word of God**. In vv6-9. Abraham declares that it was Yahweh, who called him from his land, and who promised that Canaan would be given to his offspring. Abraham trusts in God' words to him.

He believes that God will provide a wife - that the servant's quest will succeed - "*The LORD, the God of heaven ... he will send his angel before you; you shall take a wife for my son from there...*"

We see the quality of Abraham's faith, in living by what God has said *already*. These are Abraham's last recorded words. It is in great contrast to his first recorded words to God in Genesis 15. 'O Sovereign Lord *what* can you give me... O Sovereign Lord, *how* can I know...' Here Abraham, knows God has spoken, that God promised and he is sure God will provide. His faith, has led to action. While it can be said that God is not pro-actively guiding Abraham, he *still* is guiding, through His revealed words.

Abraham may have personally had a whole set of views about the wife for his son. But he is guided by what God has said.

We have the voice of Scripture. God has spoken. He speaks through Scripture. We may at times pray and ask for God's will, to know his voice, yet his voice may already be in your hands – in your bible. We ask him to speak, but he may have already spoken through the teachings, promises and revelations in scripture.

We remember at this point. 'The Bible is our primary source of revelation. It is the ultimate authority by which we weigh all other words. We verify prophecies, dreams, angelic visitations, visions, images, audible voices, supernatural hunches, and all other sorts of impressions, against the absolute truths of Scripture.

So if they do not measure up, they don't get in the door, simple as that.'

How does Abraham act in his time of necessity, he hears God's voice *in what God has already said*. We learn about God through bible study; we also listen for God's voice through the Bible.

The third way is that of **desires**. Abraham desires that his son will have a wife, from among his own people. His adamant on this point: "*you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites ... but will go to my country and my own relatives.*"

God uses the desires of Abraham. It is these desires that cause the servant, not to be given a general commission, to find a non-Canaanite wife; but rather a specific commission, to find a wife among his relatives. Abraham's desire sends the servant to Nahor, where he meets Rebekah, and God's appointed one is brought to *her* appointed one: Isaac.

Two examples.

Firstly. Acts 15, after the Jerusalem Council, it says "Paul said to Barnabas, let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Now, Luke is comfortable sharing when the Spirit overtly speaks. This seems simply a desire of Paul. This desire God uses to initiate the second missionary journey.

Second example. When I was finishing university, I thought God was guiding me to work as a full time Christian university worker. Things were put in process, people chatted to etc, but during that final year, every time I read something about Eastern Europe, my spirit skipped. Best way to describe it. But I assumed this was about something later in life.

The post for the university did not happen. A few months later, God led me to apply to work with Operation Mobilisation for 2 years.

When I was interviewed, they asked me where I'd like to work. In my heart I knew. My desire. To serve God in Eastern Europe. So in that situation, one part of God speaking, was within the desires of my heart.

God can use our desires, to guide us the way he wants. Yet we must test our desires, give them to God, and ask them to become his, if we are to act on them. As the Psalms says – 'Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.' The key here – delight yourself *in the* Lord, your relationship with him purifies your desires slowly, so they become more his desires...

Interlude...

The servant makes his way to the town of Nahor. He pauses at a well. We now expect the servant to do something, to begin his quest for the girl...And he does. He gives the initiative to God, by praying and asking God to show him specifically whom he, God, has chosen for Isaac.

“It is this unnamed servant who is the first person of whom it is expressly recorded in the Bible that he prayed for personal divine guidance at a critical moment of his life.” (Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, p173). This prayer was spontaneous, informal and it was from the heart, and inaudible. In that moment, the servant shows, he is *in an* individual relationship with God, he *can have* direct contact, he *has a sense of constant nearness* to the divine, he understands the Creator God of Abraham to *be approachable*.' Truths we hold dear as they still apply to us.

(v11-27) Quick Answers.

“Before he had finished praying” Rebekah comes into view. She comes to the well, and she does everything he had just asked in prayer! The speed of the answer by God, is remarkable, and it illustrates both his grace and his power. As Calvin puts it: "the quickness of the answer manifests the extraordinary indulgence of God, who does not suffer the man to be long harassed with anxiety."¹ How God does it, is not revealed. But the fact that it is answered so immediate, is an encouragement to us.

It can seem impossible to us, at times, that God can guide us, or for him to speak in a situation. In fact God may answer our request for guidance almost immediately, regardless of how difficult the situation may seem.

(vv 28-61) Counsel of others

Then lots of running. Rebekah runs in. Laban runs out! He invites him to stay, preparing food for him and his men. The servant however, first declares that he wants to tell his story. We hear the whole story once again, for the benefit of the family. He finishes his tale, with the request for the family to say what they think.

If the Lord is saying ‘Rebekah is the one’ then the family will agree.

¹Calvin, p19

He asks for the counsel of others. He shares his understanding of how God has been guiding and speaking. He asks for their opinion, their discernment, as they are responsible for Rebekah.

Laban says: "*This is from the LORD ... Look, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has spoken.*"

Discernment if God is speaking, on significant matters, often involves others. Often, if he is speaking, he will move hearts and minds of others. Dreams, visions, direction from the Lord, can be highly subjective, so we weigh them against scripture, apply common sense and if directional we should seek wise counsel.

If a barrier exists from others who are consulted, that can mean God's voice hasn't been heard correctly.

When I was in Hungary, I heard about a teenager conference called **Teen Street** organised by OM each year. I thought it would be a great opportunity for the teenagers of church we worked with to attend. No one from Hungary had ever attended before. But the desire was there in me. It was in line with scripture – make disciples. However, it was tested against the counsel of others. My team agreed, my team leader Jani agreed – he was willing to go with the group to Germany. We chatted to the church pastor. He agreed. then it went to the missionary field leader and the senior staff - Terry and the others agreed. I had this dream, this desire, but I sought the counsel of others.

(vv62-67) **God's voice has a purpose**

A beautiful ending. Rebekah, her maids, the servant and his men all travel back. They meet Isaac, and he told about the servant's quest. He welcomes Rebekah as his wife. The commission is finished.

This was God's answer. God had made the servant's trip a success.

In these final verses, we are reminded when he speaks he has a goal, a purpose. Perhaps for that moment, or for that day or more significantly. Here it was to bring Rebekah to Isaac. In life, likewise, I believe, God guides to a goal. Therefore, we can be assured that as we respond to God's voice, then that aim is being met, even if we are not aware of it.

For example. We are praying for someone. A bible verse comes to mind. We share it with our friend. Sometimes we do not know what the purpose is. A story I remember was from my previous church. There was a lady called Mary. Once a month we would offer anointing for oil for healing, after Communion. Mary would pray with me for people. At the end I prayed with her and Zephaniah 3:17 came to mind – 'the Lord is with you, he is mighty to save, he will take great delight in you, he will rejoice over you with singing and quiet you with his love.' Now, to be honest a few times this verse has come to mind when praying with people, and I thought it most likely was just my well intentioned thoughts.

But I thought – it is a good upbuilding verse. So I shared it, saying, when we were praying, this verse came to mind, it may be something, God could be wanting, me to share with you.

Mary later shared a testimony at St Leonards...

"We had held a healing service in church and I asked Rev. Grant to pray for me. The prayer was only short but some words really stood out to me and I held them in my heart. *The Lord was singing over me!* That same night when I read a verse from my little book *I am With You*, the last line of the verse said "In My arms of love go forward with a song in your heart." The whole verse was beautiful but this was the line that stood out.

When I was being wheeled along the corridor to the operation theatre I remember saying a prayer and feeling at peace as the Lord was telling me "He Was Singing over me," the next thing I was aware of was waking up in the ward. The operation had been a success."

For me that was just a verse. For Mary it was a verse that with other readings, gave her peace and strength as she went into that operation, believing the Lord was with her. She regularly read her bible, she prayed, yet on that day, the Lord added a word of encouragement to comfort her...

He has a purpose when he speaks.

To conclude...

We have seen in the story of Rebekah and Isaac, some useful principles to help us know what God is saying or when he is speaking.

God can use *necessity* - external factors;

He can use *scripture* – he was already spoken and can speak through it;

He can use our own *desires*, to guide us into his ways.

God can answer quickly.

There is the importance of the counsel of others.

Finally God speaks with an aim in mind, a purpose.

Shall we pray.

Lord, thank you for the ways you speak. Open our ears. Help us to hear and know. Give us wisdom as we listen to others. Give us courage when what you say stretches us. In Jesus name. Amen.