

SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 29 MAY 2016



Does God Still Speak to Us Verbally?

John Piper

The following is a transcript of an interview.

Presenter:

“Do we need to be listening for God’s voice to speak to us outside the Bible? Does He desire to speak to us audibly like he does to certain people in the Bible? And if so, Pastor John, how do we know if it’s God’s voice we’re hearing?”

John Piper:

I am going to say something positive here and not just negative. In fact, most of what I have to say is positive and the first and main thing is to say: God really has spoken. And this Word is living and active. It is not a dead Word. He really speaks today through the inspired Scriptures. He really, really does. Not just with information, but with himself by his Spirit.

1 Samuel 3:21 “The Lord appeared at Shiloh for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the Word of the Lord.” That really happens. God stands forth from his inspired Word as we read it prayerfully and dependently.

And, I would add this: that the Word in the Bible is more sure than anything you can hear outside the Bible. I base that on 1 Corinthians 14:37 “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”

That is amazing. Paul is saying you can call yourself a prophet and get messages from God. You can call yourself spiritual and be tuned in to God, but if anything you say doesn’t accord with what I say, you are not recognized, which means that outside the Bible we have fallible, uncertain impressions and messages. Inside the Bible we have rock solid dependable messages. So there are treasures and wonders and glories and dimensions of God to be seen in the Bible that we have scarcely seen.

It seems to me to be folly to crave the lesser authority and the lesser riches outside the Bible than the riches and the greater authority that we have barely tasted, let alone digested inside the Bible.

Now having said that positive thing about the Bible that I love. I just love the Bible so much and I know that after, what, 60 years of reading my Bible I have barely scratched the surface of its glories. So I kind of get ticked, frankly, at myself and others who are craving stuff outside the Bible as though there is something better to be had out there.

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Having said all that, I don’t see anything in the Bible that would say God can’t communicate with us in extraordinary ways outside the Bible. He can. And if he does, we should test it by his infinitely authoritative risen Word and we should commend it to those whose lives show a deep, long wisdom in

Christ. There is this community dimension to testing all things like Paul said. Don’t despise prophecies. Test all things. Hold fast to what is good. That is just not a private thing. That is something we do with others as well.

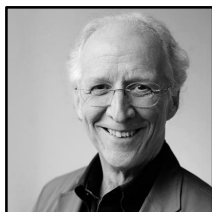
But I will close with this. Beware of craving the sensations of a voice. Jesus warned against those who seek a sign (Mark 8:11-13). So here he is. He is standing there in front of the Pharisees and scribes speaking and they say: Give us a sign.

What does that mean? It means that the voice of Jesus Christ the Son of God wasn't adequate. They needed something more. They needed to feel more, touch more, see more. They wanted more. And Jesus wouldn't give it to them.

And I think we are in a situation today not unlike that. We hear more of the Son of God than anybody in Jesus' day ever heard, because we have all four gospels and those people got it in snatches.

Therefore, we have the wholeness of the revelation that Jesus communicated, and it is speaking to us every time we read the Bible. And if we turn away from that and say: But I need a sign. I need a voice. I need a tree to fall down in the woods when I am talking. I need something. We are putting ourselves in the position of those who demanded a sign.

Instead, I think our hearts should be: Oh Lord, this is the way Paul taught the Ephesians to pray in Ephesians 1:17. Give my heart sight. Open my eyes to your power. Open my eyes to your wisdom. Open my eyes to your inheritance. You say stunning things that should blow me away and give me a sense of your worth beyond anything any message outside should give. So, Father, if I am not seeing, if I am not hearing, have mercy upon me and open my eyes.



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Source: www.desiringgod.org/interviews/does-god-verbally-speak-to-me

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Do you believe that God has audibly spoken to anyone since the age of the apostles?

R C Sproul

I don't know for sure whether God has or not.

Certainly there are abundant cases in church history where people claim to have heard voices that were the audible voice of God. Joan of Arc would be Exhibit A. That testimony has come

more than once from people whom we generally recognize as being reputable saints, and so I hesitate to cast aspersions on their testimony.

On the other hand, we find that even in sacred Scripture, during a time when God was giving direct communication of divine revelation through Jesus, the occurrences of an audible voice of God from heaven were extremely rare. I can only think of three times in the New Testament that there's a record of God speaking audibly, and all three of them were occasions where the Father made a public declaration about his Son, who incidentally is no longer with us on this planet in the flesh. There's no other record of anyone being talked to by God audibly, with the exception of Saul (Paul) on the road to Damascus.

Even in the Old Testament, though it happens with those who are agents of revelation, those occurrences are very rare indeed. In biblical times, even at the height of divine revelation, audible revelation direct from heaven was rare.

I don't think we are in a period of redemptive history in which we're getting special revelation from God. It would seem to me it would be even less likely that you would get that kind of audible expression from God today.

Add to that a factor that many Christians don't like to consider: Hearing voices when there's no discernible source can be a manifestation of a psychosis. I'm not saying it is, but it can be. There are people who do suffer from hallucinatory experiences in which they hear voices as a result of chemical imbalances and so on. I can't think of anyone who has ever told me they actually heard the audible voice of God, but if they did, I would be concerned about their mental state. I wouldn't conclude immediately that they were crazy, but I don't think it's normal or expected in the devout Christian life to be hearing the audible voice of God.



Robert Charles Sproul is an American theologian, author, and pastor. He is the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries.

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