

SALT CO 1/11/26

The Word of God and the Rule of God

***“Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble;
and he saved them from their distress;
he sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from destruction.”***

Psalm 107:19-20

Table Talk I

Share one thing you are looking forward to in 2026.

SALT TALK

To re-cap as we step into this new year, we are exploring what it looks like to have and grow in a conversational relationship with God. This is particularly relevant for us as Seasoned Adults. As we navigate on the ever-changing terrain on Route 60+ we can become more *able* to attune to His presence.

The question, as we have said before, is, do we *want* to have this conversation? What if we heard the voice of God “unexpectedly”? Then His word would come as an intrusion, a disruption. God would appear to us as a rude, unwelcome presence.

But what if we do want to have this conversational relationship with God? What might that be like? What would change? Would I change? How?

To get at some answers to these questions we’ve been using as our resource Dallas Willard’s book,

Book Hearing God.

You can also go back over what we’ve been talking about by going to our webpage

In this conversational relationship God speaks to us in many ways: He speaks to us in His creation, He speaks through His word written- our bibles, sometimes in dreams and visions, sometimes God speaks to us through other people, but primarily, as we saw last time, He speaks through what is described in the prophet Elijah's encounter with God as a "**still, small voice**".

Willard writes,

"A major point of this book is that the still, small voice- or the interior or inner voice, as it is also called- is the preferred and most valuable form of individual communication for God's purposes. God usually addresses individually those who walk with him in a mature, personal relationship using this inner voice, showing forth the reality of the kingdom of God as they go." (p. 118)

Here's the thing. Because this "voice" is still, and "small" it can easily be overlooked, even dismissed. Because most of the time God speaks with us gently, His thoughts in our thoughts, we might think this still small voice sounds weak.

Hardly! This is our focus today. "*The Word of God and the Rule of God*". We're going to see today that when we understand the place words and the words of God have in reality, we will find we are paying attention to how we pay attention in deeper, focused, leaning in, life changing ways.

This is very important for us as Seasoned Adults to understand how we pay attention to His speaking.

Willard begins with what words are. By itself, a word, say of graffiti sprayed on some wall, or something you hear someone say in a crowded room, is just a bit of sound, a "mark". In contrast, you hear me speaking "words" in this moment, these are not just marks or sounds, hopefully (!) because I'm speaking them. What is essential to a person's word is the meaning given to it by the person- the thought, feeling or action the person associates with that word and wants to convey to others.

Willard

“Through our words we literally give others a piece of our minds. By hearing or reading others’ words, we may know their thoughts and feelings and share in their lives.”

Hearing God, p. 157

Willard recalls the old saying parents or grandparents would sometimes offer their kids or grandkids when they experienced verbal insults, *“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.”*

As we all came to find out, this is completely false.

As Proverbs says,

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue” Proverbs 18:21

and James,

“So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire...”

James 3:5-6a

In fact, words are *spiritual forces*. This is a core truth in what we are talking about this morning. You could walk out of here right now with that thought in your heart and mind. Words are spiritual forces.

The point is,

“The word as a *person’s speaking* is therefore to be understood as a ‘spiritual power’- whether of ourselves, of God, or some other personal agency and whether for evil or for good. It is the power of the one who is speaking. It is precisely in this realm that God seeks for those who would worship Him in ***“Spirit and truth”*** (John 4:23). He desires truth in the ‘inward being’ and will ‘teach me wisdom in my secret heart’.” (Psalm 51:6)

Hearing God, p. 159

God does this with and by His word because words are spiritual forces.

Willard points out,

“The word of God... is his speaking, his communicating. When God speaks, he expresses his mind, his character and his purposes. Thus God is always present with his word.”

Hearing God, p. 159

All expressions of God’s mind are “words” of God:

-in creation, listen to Psalm 19

***“The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.***

***Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.***

There is no speech, nor are there words;

their voice is not heard;

yet their voice goes out through all the earth,

and their words to the end of the world.”

Psalm 19:1-4

-God’s word is spoken to us through other human beings. Someone has a “word” for us that is a God word... I’ll come back to this.

-the Bible is God’s word written. It bears witness to Jesus, the Word of God!

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Willard writes, “God’s rule over all things, including human affairs, is carried out through His word understood in this way. God’s kingdom is a kingdom of words. It works, rules, by the communication of thoughts and

intentions through words or other symbols, for a kingdom is a network of personal relationships.”

[The word of God is invisible and at the same time the spiritual reality that produces all that is visible- our universe!]

God's word is creatively powerful.

Willard uses the example of baking a cake to help us begin to grasp how this is so on our human level. How does the cake begin? Not with eggs and flour. Not yet! It begins with your thought, a picture in your mind, an “idea”- “*Time to bake a cake!*” You and I can’t speak the cake into being the way God can make a universe. God is infinite. We are not!. Maybe we have to learn how to bake a cake. Take a class. Have someone teach us. Then comes the day to do this on our own. We get the eggs, flour, sugar, heat the oven and set the time. Here’s a similarity between God’s creating and ours- when we finish that cake (if it turns out well...) we delight in it. It is the expression of our thoughts, feelings and intentions and our making. I love Genesis 1:31 for this. When God completed His creating everything God delighted, “***It is very good*** [I think the better translation is “beautiful!”].

Here’s the point:

“Here in this restricted range of direct action, God has given us a power that, so far as our conscious control is concerned, is as immediately creative as his own. A realization of how our own thoughts (inner worlds) translate themselves into an act of creation is absolutely vital if we are to gain any concrete sense of God’s rule through his word. Only if we have some understanding for what it means for his word to act will we have any grounds for believing that God can have a personal, guiding relationship with us.” 2X

Hearing God, p. 163

I have a question in the Table Talk, when did someone speak a word to you that resulted in, evoked a change in you? That created a new awareness, a resolve to create something, do something you’ve never done before? My grandfather’s word to me, “*Learn to type!*” A woman at a

retreat center where I was wrestling with sermon plans, “*Be the sermon*”. A man at a gathering sits down next to me with his cup of coffee, someone I’d never met before, turns to me and says, “*Every day, we do our bit!*” A woman comes up to me on the church patio and says apologetically, “I think I have a word for you...” I was curious. “Tell me, please.” She said, “*Take care of your flock.*” God’s word active through others, graciously powerful to work creatively in me, through me. To change me. Grow me.

Jesus is God’s personal Word spoken at one point in human history, He is God’s language made visible by emptying Himself, by refraining from all but selective use of His capabilities with which He created the universe.

Here’s a thought we’ll have to mull on...

“The apparent paradox of the incarnation is that Christ’s ‘infleshment’ was really not an imposed restriction but rather the supreme exercise of the supreme power, as the end of human history will make abundantly clear.”

Hearing God, p. 167

I mean, look at what GOD created in our human history by coming as a baby born in obscurity...

Jesus is the Word of God ordering the universe and the Son of God who could turn water into wine, calm the waves and walk on them. He could also place the word of God’s kingdom rule into people’s hearts where it would bear fruit a hundredfold, of sixtyfold, or thirtyfold.

That could make of the likes of you and me the salt of the earth.

As I said, the kingdom of God works in large measure by, with and through words because God’s words have authority and power.

The centurion understood this.

As far as we can tell he had no specific religious commitment or training, but he did know how authority worked, and he recognized that Jesus was working with authority to heal. He asked for Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus said, “***I will come and cure him.***” The centurion surprisingly replied, “***Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my***

roof. But only speak the word, and my servant will be healed."

(Matthew 8:8)

He explains himself, "***For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go', and he goes, and to another, 'Come', and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this', and the slave does it***". (Matt. 8:9; Lk. 7:8)

Jesus was amazed.

People use words to get what they want- recognition, justification, influence, control, material gain, power. Think about propaganda. Or advertising. Our experience with words hinders rather than helps us to have that centurion's confidence and trust, maybe even our trust in God's word.

How can we help others we love deeply experience the integrity of trustworthy words? To keep my word helps build confidence not only in me, but also in the vital importance of words truly spoken. Words that matter in connection. Relationship.

This raises a crucial question and turning point in Jesus' ministry. Could the exercise of God's power of God's kingdom authority be transferred to his followers?

First, he sent out the Twelve (read Matthew 10:7-8, "***go... to the house of Israel, and preach as you go, saying the 'kingdom of heaven is at hand'. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons...***" Then He sent out the Seventy (Luke 10:1ff), "***...heal the sick... say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you...***"

Result of this experiment?

"The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning...'". Luke 10:17-18

Here is a note from my study bible on this verse, "*In a prophetic vision, Jesus recognizes that his own mission, shared now with his followers, spells the defeat of all the forces of evil.*"

We hear in Luke's Gospel

“At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, ‘I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will...’”

Luke 10:21

Jesus is rejoicing, his bowtie spinning, the kingdom of God will work in and through the likes of people like you and me! SALT CO people! This, Jesus now sees, is going global! How? Through the word of God, the power of God at work in every person who receives His word (in all that we have talked about what His word says and does and is). [WHEN WE ARE LIKE THIS!= SALT OF THE EARTH!]

That still, small voice we hear in our conversational relationship with God (is not weak), it is the Lord of the Universe whom we know in Person in Jesus Christ speaking life into you and me, with the power to make you and me a new creation (II Cor. 5:17).

TABLE TALK II

1. Talk about something you created. Start with the thought, idea, picture in your mind. How did you feel about what you created after you finished it?
2. In what ways are words a spiritual force?
3. Share a time when someone spoke a word to you that resulted in some change in your life.
4. How does the Bible, God's word written, help you in having a conversational relationship with God?
5. What new thought stands out for you this morning about the word of God that you're going to have mull on for a while?

WRAP UP

Quick review of two questions, if time.

Here is one more good word for SALT CO this morning. Hear the word of God:

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see everything has become new.”

II Corinthians 5:17

His word is the power to make new
 All things, His creatures,
 His beautiful creation
 And the ones He made like Him
 whom He created to be creators
 to know His good pleasure when they make
 but also with the freedom to unmake.
 He creates still, and re-creates by His word
 In and with His people
 His word in them,
 Them making new
 So that with each human step we trust to take
 We are, ourselves, being made
 new.

DOXOLOGY and BLESSING

If time, two questions to close.

1. How does a life in which one speaks the creative word of God differ from a life of voodoo, magic or superstition?
 - a. Magic is the attempt to influence the actual course of events by manipulation of symbols or special substances such as effigies and incantations.
 - b. Satanism and demonism are in service to or from power that is personal but evil.

- c. Magic and witchcraft are forms of superstition that work from the belief that some action, substance, circumstance not logically or naturally related to a certain course of events nonetheless influence the outcome of those events.
 - d. Effects of voodoo magic only work through the prevailing psychosocial order.
 - e. There is no magic or superstition found in Moses, Jesus, Paul, Peter and the work of God. Nor in the work of believers spreading God's word.
 - f. Key: we do not believe that the power resides in the words used in rituals or the rituals taken by themselves, but simply ways ordained in the nature of things as established by God for accomplishing the work as part of life in the kingdom of God.
 - g. So NOT "name it and claim it", formulaic thinking=magical thinking, "I can cause God to do something..."
 - h. NOT legalism which is a form of superstition, where I believe and claim my overt action in conforming to the rule is what makes me right and pleasing to God
 - i. All of which boil down to seeking ways to gain control of people and events bypassing the realities of the heart, soul from which life really flows. The letter kills, the Spirit gives life. ((I Cor. 3:6).
2. What does the Bible have to do with the word of God as we've discussed so far?
- a. The Bible is one of the results of God's speaking. It is the unique written word of God
 - b. The Word of God is not simply the Bible. The Bible tells us this!
 - i. The Bible is not Jesus Christ, come to dwell among us, raised to the right hand of the Father
 - ii. The Bible does not express itself in creation (Psalm 19).
 - c. The Bible is a finite, written record of the saving truth spoken by the infinite, living God, and reliably fixes the boundaries of everything he will ever say to humankind. It fixes those boundaries in principle, though it does not provide detailed

communications that God may have with individuals today. (p. 186).

- d. We are warned in the Bible that we can use the Bible for personal gain (John 5:36-47)
- e. Our only protection from our pride is in our conversational relationship with God.