

Are We Experiencing a 'Word' Famine?

“‘The time is surely coming,’ says the Lord  God, ‘that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord’” (Amos 8:11-12).

The thought strikes me that the famine is not so much for the lack of speaking as the lack of *hearing*. I have had the increasing impression that God’s people do not know how to *hear* the word of God. Or, unlike the Thessalonian converts from paganism, they do not believe that the word they are hearing is indeed God’s word.

Therefore, the word is received casually if not indifferently as the word of man, that is to say, without effect. Perhaps we have been filling up on verbal “junk food” and have dulled our appetites for “real food” by the profusion of much speaking of our own that leaves us sated if not bloated, and therefore we suffer malnutrition in the midst of seeming plenty. Certainly we lack the evidence of growth and change that the word of God *should* accomplish, and we seem fixed in our immaturity and shallowness.

Perhaps we need to consider that the act of hearing is as much an act of grace as that of speaking itself. Surely God’s word

requires an attentiveness and retention for which the world has not schooled us. The sobering caution, "When you hear My voice, harden not your hearts" implies that God's word will not allow our indifference. If there is not a *hearing*, then there will certainly be a *hardening*!

Even now, vast numbers of us are numb. We are "hearing" but not hearing. We are unchanged in both our life and our knowledge of God, and consequently find ourselves itching for any momentary and engaging novelty. Man shall, after all, "live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" and if people are deprived of the Word of God, their spirits will become as gaunt and desperate as the victims of any famine. Is it not here that our deficit of faith, hope, love, patience, forbearance and all the resiliency of our spirit is to be traced?

How many of us are numbed, unresponsive, not reflecting, not internalizing and not doing the Word? We do not retain the Word, hold it, cherish it and speak of it in the way to one another, but too quickly dismiss it in a sea of forgetfulness. We lack a mindset that cultivates and nurtures an attitude toward the Word of God as is appropriate to the great privilege that is ours to be able to hear it. Perhaps it is too late, and we are already under judgment for a callous attitude of indifference and disregard.

If it is only the pure in heart who see God, what corresponding purity of heart is needed to *hear* God? How often have we dismissed His word because it has come through an earthen vessel not of our choosing and whose accent and coloration conceals God, but does not make Him mute? Better to choose to believe God in that speaking than to dismiss it as man.

Paul rejoiced that the Thessalonians, on hearing His word, received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectively works also in you who believe. It performed such a work as not only to “turn them from their idols to serve the living God” but also “to wait for His son from heaven ... who delivered us from the wrath to come!” (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

Would not the whole level of our church life become apostolically elevated if God’s people came to the hearing of the word with such an expectancy? Would not our ministers of the Word need to seek the Lord more earnestly for His Word if they knew they were standing before congregations of such a kind? Would we not then all go on from faith to faith and glory to glory? Then could we testify with the Psalmist, “He sent His word and healed them” (Psalm 107:20).

What is yet more frightening is that we are doing with the *reading* of

the Word the same that we are doing in the hearing. Has it not become
for us what Ezekiel's spoken words became for his generation,
"a very
lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice" (33:32)—and *we do them not*? We do not receive the word of God as something
that would affect our
conduct and our relationships.

O the impertinence that stands above the Word as we humanly
determine what is to be considered or employed to
the degree that it fits into the parameters of our
acceptability! Pity
the Israelite who scorned the word of the blood and chose not
to bend to
dip so as *to apply it*! For how many of us is the value of
God's Word lost for just that lack of humility and submission
before the Word of God and the God of the Word? If we will not
be subordinated to
the Word of God, then how much less to each other?

Rightly did the
great theologian of the 20th century, Karl Barth, state that
our "full and perfect salvation consists in this subordination
to Him,
and in this subordination is the co-ordination with its fellow
creatures
which is ordained by Him." Let us humble ourselves before the
Word of
God that we might live.

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Katz (1929-2007) was a prophetic teacher. As a young Marxist
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