

A socially-distanced walk (1)

Mr. O, thank you for agreeing to meet up with me for a socially-distanced walk. I've got a few things on my mind and I'm hoping you might be able to help me.

It's a pleasure. Besides, the exercise will do me good. So let's get down to business straightaway. What would you like to ask?

Before we get round to my main question, may I ask you, Mr. O, how long you have been a Christian?

I was converted at the end of the school summer holidays in 1957, just before I was fifteen. So you do the maths.

Wow! That's almost 64 years ago! But it means that you are probably the right person to answer my question. During your long Christian life, what has helped you more than anything else?

That 's a question I'm often asked and I find it most encouraging. But my answer is always the same. Just as the Lord has designed a mother's milk to be exactly right for her new-born, and a loving family to be exactly right for his development, so He has designed the gathered church to be all that is necessary for a person's spiritual growth. Without hesitation I can tell you that nothing has helped me more than being an active member of a Bible-believing, Christ-loving, cross-proclaiming church.

After I was converted I got baptised and joined such a church. Its members have become my spiritual family and I love them all. But, to be honest, I don't get much out of the Sunday services. This is because our pastor's preaching is so dull.

Yep, that's the way it is. Those of us who are pastors are full of faults. Like everyone else in Christ's church, we are just sinners saved at the cross. We're growing in grace but we're not perfect yet. And, with a few rare exceptions, we are a pretty dull lot.

So what can be done about it?

That question needs addressing, but it's not the first thing we should ask. A better starting-point would be to consider Ephesians 2:17 where Paul, writing of Christ, says, 'He came and preached peace to you'.

I'm sorry, but I can't see what you are driving at.

Okay, but just bear with me for a moment. Jesus ascended to heaven in A.D. 30, but there was no church in Ephesus until over twenty years later; and Paul did not write the words that I've quoted until about ten years after that. So how is that Paul can insist

that Jesus preached to the Ephesian church when, in fact, He never went near the place?

I don't know. I've never thought about it.

What Paul is saying is that when he, Paul, preached at Ephesus, it was in fact Jesus who was preaching! And in the years since Paul left, Jesus has continued to preach there – through the men who took over from Paul. The fact is that the Christian church has only ever had one Preacher. Whenever a man stands up to biblically preach, it is actually the Lord Jesus Christ who is preaching. And – here's the point to grasp – that is true even when the human instrument is dull!

So, what you're saying is that even if my pastor is dull, I've got to listen to him as if I was listening to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

Yes, you've got it in one! Every time your pastor expounds the Scriptures, Christ is speaking. The trouble is that you are not hearing Him. So listen for the other Voice that speaks. It makes no sound of its own. And yet it can be heard! It can! If you pray and pray . . . and listen and listen . . . and expect and expect . . . you will hear the Saviour speak to you directly. Just to you. You will have personal dealings with the Lord. And you will never be the same again.

Thank you! I think you might just have rescued my Christian life. I'll do as you say. And I'll let you know how I get on.