

A walk with Mr O (15)

There is hearing – and there is hearing!

Mr O, there's a group of us who became friends at the Christian camps we have been on through the years. We meet up from time to time, but last month was the first time since Covid.

I reckon that you really enjoyed that!

Yes, it was good to catch up, to share our experiences, and to pray together. But, to be honest, it left me rather sad.

And why was that?

Well, almost every one of us had to say that our churches are no longer the happy places they used to be. There are so many tensions. They have probably been there for a long time, but Covid seems to have brought them into the open. Lots of the Lord's people are simply not getting on with each other.

And, in your view, what does the Lord Jesus Christ think of that?

He must be broken-hearted. I can't believe that He wants things to be like that. Churches are precious to Him, aren't they? He bled for His people. He died for them. He surely can't want gospel-loving Christians to be uncomfortable with each other.

I'm agreeing with everything you say, and I'm assuming that you want to ask me something about all this.

Yes, Mr O! Why has all this happened? What is the explanation? And what is the cure?

The answer is straightforward. The devil is obviously at work. But we must go beyond that. The devil could not have done what he's done if each believer in each church was regularly hearing what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying to them.

Wait a minute Mr O. We are talking about people who read their Bibles at home, who listen to sound Bible exposition on Sundays, and

who go each week to church Bible studies. So they are regularly hearing what the Lord has to say to them, aren't they?

Yes, and no. This is because there is hearing – and there is hearing!

I'm sorry, but I don't know what you mean.

Let's go to Galilee and hear our Lord telling His parable of the sower. He is sitting in a small boat off shore, teaching a great crowd of people on the beach. Everyone is hearing what He has to say. They are so attentive that they can all easily repeat His parable. But then He says to them all, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'

So it was possible to hear the Lord, and yet not to hear Him at all!

Exactly! We see the same thing in the Epistle to the Hebrews where the apostle, writing to believers, quotes Psalm 95:7-8 three times in two minutes: 'Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' Those Christians were hearing the inspired epistle read to them, but were not necessarily hearing the Saviour's voice. And the apostle is making it plain that they will never hear that voice unless they want to. This implies, of course, that they must be willing to do what the voice says.

I'm beginning to understand. In the Revelation is that why each of the seven letters to the churches ends by saying, 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches'?

Yes. Having ears to hear means that our physical ears hear the infallible Word of God through the preacher, the reader, or whoever; our minds understand what is being said; but something deeper is going on. In our heart of hearts we want to have dealings with Christ Himself. We want to do what He wants us to do. So we pray, and we wait, and we long, and we listen, and then, in the depths of our soul, we hear the 'still small voice', or - as I would prefer to translate it – 'the voice of a gentle silence'.

This experience does not come to hardened hearts. If our hearts are soft we find that silently (so silently), delightfully, irresistibly, an inward conviction takes hold of us and propels us in a certain direction. It is the Lord. It is the lack of this spiritual experience which is the cause of all our church troubles.

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