

A walk with Mr O (41)

The wonder of it all!

Mr O, why are there so many awkward silences in our prayer meetings?

It's not only in prayer meetings that we find awkward silences, is it? Again, and again the Lord gives us golden opportunities to speak a word for Him, and we clamp up and say nothing.

I wish that wasn't true. But, yes, it is. Why? What stops us speaking up, either in prayer meetings or in witnessing?

A few days ago, I went to visit a family that I had only recently met. As we chatted in their kitchen I noticed that they had an old-fashioned whistling kettle sitting on their stove. But it wasn't whistling. Do you know why?

Well, Mr O, I've never seen a whistling kettle, except in old films. But I know that the whistle on the spout only makes a noise when the water is boiling. So, I assume that the water wasn't boiling.

And now you've got the answer to your original question. The kettle doesn't whistle if the water isn't boiling. But once the water is boiling, the whistle can't help but whistle!

So, our awkward silences are caused by the fact that we are not on the boil?

Exactly, you've got it in one.

So, what can we do to get ourselves boiling?

Now we're getting to the heart of the matter. It's interesting that our English word 'zeal' comes from the Greek verb 'to boil'. Zeal, of course, is an unstoppable enthusiasm which boils up in the heart.

The Scriptures command us to be men and women of zeal. Moffatt translates the opening of Romans 12:11 as 'Never let your zeal flag'.

While another scholar, Dr Harrington Lees, translates the next phrase as 'Kept at boiling point by the Spirit'. Our awkward silences are caused by our disobedience to these instructions.

Yes, Mr O. But that still doesn't answer my question: what can we do to get ourselves boiling? How do we go about it?

One of the first things I ever read of the late Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones was an address that he gave to an international students' conference in the summer of 1939. At one point he was talking about the place of feelings in the Christian life.

He told the students not to focus on their feelings, but instead to lose themselves 'in the glorious objectivity of the New Testament'. If they did that, he said, their 'subjective states would soon take care of themselves.'

Sorry, but I'm not sure that I've got hold of that. Could you explain it a little further?

You don't get the kettle to boil by studying the phenomenon of boiling. You simply turn the heat up. In practice this means thinking about the great facts of the gospel – thinking, thinking and thinking about them until you are overcome with the wonder of it all.

As you contemplate the beauty of God, His eternal love for you, the incarnation and life and death and resurrection of His Son, His present high-priestly intercession, His imminent coming, the working of His Spirit and the rule of His providence, it all begins to grip you, to move you, to thrill you, to subdue you. At last, you are 'lost in wonder, love and praise'. The water is boiling and the whistle sings!

So, there's no need for our awkward silences then? You're saying that by taking time to meditate we can all be 'kept at boiling point by the Spirit'?

Taking time is the secret. Too many Christians read their Bible in a rush. Their prayers are hurried. And meditation is something they simply don't do. 'Take time to be holy' remains good advice. 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10) has never been taken out of the Bible.

Before we go our separate ways today, let me quote something from Alexander Whyte: 'Thinking enough, meditating enough, musing enough on Christ will do it.

Yes, if you will, you can think, and read, and pray yourself into the possession of a heart as hot as Paul's heart. For the same Holy Spirit as gave Christ His hot heart and Paul his hot heart is given to you also.'
