
TIMELY AND TRUE SPIRITUALS

Small Beginnings

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Not everything that looks or seems spiritual comes from the heart of God, and most of us need practical instruction to be able to distinguish between the *truly spiritual*, and those promptings that are pseudo-spiritual. Spiritual promptings, spiritual giftings that come from God are not the same as those that come from the *human* spirit—or from *demonic* spirits. In the Bible, we see examples of people who lead others astray by prophesying “*a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord*” (Jeremiah 23:16), and instances when an evil spirit gives rise to a supposed word from God that is false (Zechariah 13:2-3).

The word of God is the great arbiter that enables us to determine, in a doctrinal sense, whether a prophecy is from God, or not. Since the written word of God provides the litmus test for every detail of life in the spiritual dimension (2 Peter 1:3-4), it will never be the case that a spoken prophesy or a counseled action will contradict what the Bible says. But in addition to this valuable and necessary tool for learning about *spirituals*, the Bible is also hugely helpful in giving us pointers about the patterns and ways in which God does things on earth and, thereby, how we might expect Him to lead us in ministry.

HEARING GOD’S VOICE

The key, of course, is learning how to discern His voice. That’s why Jesus urges, “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*” (Matthew 11:15). How can we better apprehend the voice of the Lord? How can we be better led by Him? How do we begin to suspect that He is giving us a prophecy, for instance, to deliver to others? The promise of Scripture is that when we turn to the right or to the left, we will hear a voice “*behind*” us, saying, *Yes! “This is the way, walk in it”* (Isaiah 30:21). How can we better grasp that sort of confirmation, and end up living our lives according to the Lord’s detailed and specific plan?

The voice of the Lord is very, very faint, and if we expect that spiritual promptings and directions will come to us with the voice of Charlton Heston, we will miss them. Because we understand that God is all-powerful, and since we observe Him intervene miraculously and mightily in life, we make the understandable miscalculation of assuming that His voice will be loud—even booming.

It doesn't help our thinking when our culture, in cartoons, movies and dramas, portrays the voice of God as a slow, deep bass; many believers expect to hear an accompanying swell of violins or, at least, some window-rattling when God talks. Such is not the case. Neither do lightning, puffs of smoke or bodily twitches manifest when the Lord speaks to us.

Echoes of His Word

God's voice most often comes as an echo, a repetition of what He has said in His word. In other words, a prophecy or any other *spiritual* will be triggered to our understanding by a scriptural reference; a verse, a story from the Bible will suddenly (i.e., unexpectedly) pop into our mind—along with a sense of what that passage means for the current need or situation. One of the main reasons why believers think they do not hear the voice of the Lord is that they have very little of the scriptures in their heart or mind.

Picture, if you will, the contrast between an orchestral xylophone with its 44 hardwood bars and an infant's toy xylophone with 4 metal bars: one resonates with multiple notes; the other produces but a few clinky sounds. The more Bible in our heart, the more God's voice will resonate within us. Reading and meditating on God's words, as a regular and frequent activity in our lives, will greatly increase our ability to detect His whisper to our soul. Not only will we be better attuned to the tone of His voice (i.e., its kindness and affection) as a result of reading the Bible, but we will also be better versed in the vocabulary of revelation.

Bible verses and stories are like the basic colors God blends and mixes when He wants to paint a *spiritual* in our awareness; similarly, like the basic, distinct image-strokes used to build Chinese characters, which are, themselves, compounded to portray other meanings. Becoming increasingly familiar with God's written word is the simplest way to increase our ability to discern His words and quickenings for life and ministry—and one for which there is no short cut.

FALSE LEADINGS

Among the telltale indicators of false spirituality, much akin to the bogus claims on infomercials of rapid and painless weight loss, is the promise that we can learn *more* than others or *more quickly* than other believers if we simply subscribe to a teaching or teacher. Preying on people's sincere desire to minister (more), these doctrines of demons seek to bypass the normal process of growth, and replace it with steroid spirituality, instantly extensive ministry capabilities.

Rarely do such teachers speak about the forty years Moses spent as a shepherd in Midian before he spotted the burning bush and prior to his deliverance ministry in Egypt; or Paul's 17-plus years of preparation and obscurity in the deserts of Arabia and Syria (Galatians 1:15-22) when all he was known for was his amazing conversion. It is neither accidental nor incidental that Jesus grew "*in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men*" in the many years leading up to His public ministry (Luke 2:52).

That doesn't mean that the Lord will never use a new believer for ministry, or that we must wait many years before we can hope to function in *spirituals*. Rather, it is a reminder that we should not get in a hurry or be impatient to be used by Him. The earthly dimension in which we live most of our life is a far cry from Heaven; therefore, we ought not to be "hasty in word or impulsive in thought" (Proverbs 29:20).

God's interest will always be to *develop us* more than to *use us*, and a major part of that development comes from learning to see things and do things the way He does. Time and time again, we will rediscover that He chooses and uses those things, those spirituals that naturally-minded people (including us) dismiss or overlook as too little.

LITTLE-NOTICED SEEDS

There is, of course, a world (dimension) of difference between natural wisdom and spiritual truth, but sometimes people knowledge-truths, and popular truisms echo, spiritual principles—and make scriptural truth a bit easier for us to remember. As we often remind ourselves at Christmas, looking forward to the gifts that will be under the tree, "Great gifts come in small packages." The size of the box doesn't correlate with the gift's value: diamond earrings, an iPod, or the keys to a new car DO NOT come in large containers.

Or, switching images—aren't we glad that we do not need to drag around a set of keys that are as large as the doors they're meant to unlock? "A small key can unlock the biggest door." It would be silly to suppose that keys must correlate in size with doors, and we'd have a difficult time during planting season if we had to dig holes large enough to sow seeds the size of plants or trees.

It should not, therefore surprise us that this is one of the most basic realities of the spiritual dimension as it presses in on our natural world. Things that do not catch the natural eye, or stand out by virtue of their size, hold the key to spiritual transformation. Jesus began His instruction about the kingdom of God with the parable of the seed falling on different types of soil (see Matthew 13 and Mark 4). "How will you understand all the parables," Jesus asked, "if you do not understand this one?" Why was He so concerned that His disciples grasp the truth of this parable? It's because spiritual dominion almost always begins with tiny seed.

Not only is it important to prepare the right kind of soil to receive the seed, it is also paramount that we grasp the essential difference between the size of the seed, the plant, and subsequent fruit of that seed. The seed is a condensed precursor of the plant; it is the promise of what is to be, and assuming all the right conditions of soil, water and light, an orange seed or an acorn will become a full-grown tree—in time.

Trying to squeeze the orange seed for juice to go with breakfast is as ridiculous as trying to cut sturdy boards to craft a breakfast table from the acorn. In their initial form as they first appear in

the natural world, seeds or acorns look nothing like what they will be, or what they will produce. Because we know how things work in life—orange seeds become orange trees bearing *fruit that can be squeezed into juice*—we aren't even aware of the faith at work in us when we are able to see in an orange seed, a hearty and pulpy, chilled glass of orange juice.

Spirituals follow exactly the same pattern: a seed drops to the earth, goes hidden for a season, and then emerges, both fertile and fruitful over time as something very different and more substantial than it was.

Mustard Seeds

In another of Jesus' better-known parables, He uses a mustard seed as an analogy for *spirituals* (words/truth originating in the unseen dimension) that ultimately transform and have dominion over the natural arena of life. Jesus presents us with a parable to picture the kingdom of God as it works its reality, (the will of God) into our world (see Matthew 13:31-32 and Mark 4:31-32):

"It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil,"

Botanically minded literalists completely ignore that Jesus is using an analogy—a picture that describes a *difficult to grasp* concept by comparing it with familiar items—not making a scientific statement about mustard seeds. To the people to whom Jesus was speaking, a mustard seed was the smallest seed that grew into something, a plant, that they could recognize; they understood that seeds grow in the soil.

Thus, by analogy, Jesus is telling us that Kingdom-begetting *spirituals* begin their natural lifecycle as very tiny, almost imperceptible "seeds" sown in our heart/mind/consciousness. Compared to all the other impressions, voices, urges and issues looming out there, kingdom spirituals are the least *attention grabbing*.

Crowded Thoughts

Words that God, by His Spirit, sows in our heart are all too easily crowded out by cares and worries, the pursuit of riches, natural desires and the everyday press of life on this planet. Naturally speaking—bigger seems better, and loud, urgent voices or action-thoughts usually drown out tiny, patient whispers. Consequently, Jesus warns, we will be tempted to overlook suggestions and promises that seem too weak (faint, quiet) to assertively shove their way to the front of our mind.

For instance, consider anxiety about the future. Now that's big. In an unrelenting and loud barrage of thoughts, the anxiety demands our attention. To silence it, we search for comparably-sized and equally loud assurances. We want to hear something that is beefy enough to (automatically) drive fretfulness away from the rest of our thoughts, like a younger bull moose defeating and chasing away the former leader of the herd.

But if we look for spirituals that begin their God-intended impact on our lives/ministry as *already* bigger, stronger, louder or more persuasive than the competing pronouncements of our circumstances, need or desire, we'll miss them altogether. That is Jesus' point: true *spirituals* usually start very, very unimpressively. They are easy to overlook and dismiss. Probably the biggest impression we have about them, initially, is that they are NOT big enough to do the job.

But they will be, Jesus declares. If cultivated and allowed to take root in our hearts, they will grow to such stature in our lives that all those other "*bigger*" seeds—and the vegetation they sprouted—will be overruled. Or, perhaps better put, the particulars of our lives will be arranged according to the word of God, as opposed to utterances that are either natural or demonic.

EMBRACING THE UNSEEN

The parable about mustard seeds isn't a botanically precise factoid Jesus tossed into a sermon. It's an analogy, and one that would have been familiar to the Jewish audience of the day. *Spirituals* enter our world as faintly whispered promises, still and small promptings that must be *discerned* (because they are softly articulated) and *embraced* BEFORE they grow large enough to capture other people's notice (1 Corinthians 2:14-15):

"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." ~Hebrews 11:13

Actually, one of the ways to measure spiritual maturity is how *eager* and *experienced* someone is in choosing to stay focused on *spirituals* when the promises are too faint or too small to be attention-grabbers themselves. When circumstances seem to declare one thing, and *spirituals* speak another, which statement do we believe? This is what it means to "*stand in faith*" on one of God's promises; despite how things appear in the natural arena, we choose to believe the seemingly-inconsequential, invisible word of the Lord that declares a different reality.

Changing Our World

That's how we end up with a testimony! The process begins when we receive a word or promise or prompting (a *spiritual*). That is God's testimony about what He is going to do. Next, we believe what He has spoken. Just as the very worlds themselves were formed by His word (Hebrews 11:1-3), we have all the evidence we need to believe things will happen exactly as He says.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "*Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done...*" because *spirituals* shape, create and change realities in the natural arena. The physical dimension originated from the spiritual dimension. *Spirituals* superimpose God's will/way on circumstances not of His making.

Truly spiritual activity originates with the Lord, not us. Jesus said and did whatever He observed the Father doing and saying (John 5:19). He made quite a point out of the fact that His teaching wasn't His, but His Father's (John 7:16). Ministry is an unequal partnership; the Lord prompts us with *spirituals*, then we believe and speak and do them.

Like all "*keys of the Kingdom*," indeed like Messiah Himself, they enter this world inconspicuously. But when met with faith ("*Be it done unto me according to Thy will...*"), and when given time to mature, *spirituals* are powerful seeds of change in the world around us. *Spirituals* ultimately transform and have dominion over the natural arena of life (see Matthew 13:31-32 and Mark 4:31-32). They are tiny, easily disregarded opportunities for believers to believe that we serve a *risen* Savior who's in the world today!

For more, in-depth study, you might begin with the following passages.

1. Despise Not Small Beginnings—and Grace! (Zechariah 4:10)
2. Inconsequential Things Confound Big Ones (1 Corinthians 1 and 2)
3. Mustard Seeds Eventually Reign (Mark 4:31-32)
4. God Can Reverse the Order of the World (Ezekiel 17:22-24)
5. Prepare to be Outnumbered (Luke 14:31-32)