

GOD'S CALL

God's call is for all

How God speaks to people

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We are considering the subject of “God’s call” and in the last message, we looked at the Scriptural teaching on gathering for worship and we saw that God wants all of us to come together in worship, whether we are young or old.

Today let us look to the Lord together to consider the subject of “How God speaks to us”.

This will help us to understand why it is that God wants all of us to worship together whether we are young or old, and why that is very meaningful and important in obeying God’s call for all of us. God has His ways of working and He is wise; He knows what is best.

So as we look at the Scriptures to seek to understand how God speaks to us, it will help us to know how we should respond to Him. We could look at the way that God relates with and speaks to four different categories of people. This can help us to understand the total situation of life: how God deals with us, relates with us and how He speaks to us.

The first category refers to the people in the world generally, including believers.

The second category that we can look at is the nation of Israel as a group of people.

The third category: the believers as a group of people worshipping God.

The fourth category: specific individuals and specific smaller groups.

Let us first consider the first category: the people in the world generally, including believers.

From what I can see in the Scriptures, God shows to us that He chooses to speak to people in the world generally as a whole group of people, whether they are young or old, and not as separate groups of young, not so young, old and the very old. We do not see that this is the approach that God has taken – to speak to separate groups based on their age.

When God speaks, it includes important issues of the heart, sometimes very difficult, sometimes easier. When He speaks to the world, He may also do so in the presence of believers.

At the same time, while God speaks to the whole group, He also has time for different people in this world in different situations of life.

God also speaks to each individual as a unique person, as well as to specific smaller groups of people. In this area, we will look at it more in the fourth category.

This is just to give us a general idea that while God speaks to the world generally as a whole group, He also is conscious of individuals, smaller groups, specific situations of life, and He also attends to them as and when appropriate.

Let us turn to **Mark 7: 14 and 15**. I will first be looking at the Lord Jesus and how He spoke to the people. The Lord Jesus is perfect in wisdom and His approach helps us to understand what would be effective and meaningful in the eyes of God.

Mark 7: 14-15

- 14 After He called the crowd to Him again, He *began* saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand:
- 15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.

This passage tells us that all can listen and understand. The Lord Jesus called the crowd to Him again. "The crowd" can also be translated as "a multitude" or "a large group of people". And He *began* saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand".

The Lord Jesus regularly spoke to the whole crowd and He taught them and He expected them to understand, whether young or old.

Very often, they did not understand but that was not because they could not understand. Many a time, they did not understand because their hearts were not right. If their hearts were positive, they would be able to understand what God wanted to speak to them, although there would be different degrees of depth and understanding.

There are different stages of development in our lives; there are different degrees of closeness to God, openness to God. These would affect the degree of our understanding. But we see the Lord Jesus said, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand", and He started telling them about the very important principle of what truly defiles a man.

It is not external physical things; it is what is in the heart: how we respond to moral and spiritual issues, the attitude of our lives, our character, what proceeds from deep within us. That is what is important, and that is something that all of us can understand.

Mark 8: 34-38

34 And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

I will not read the rest of the verses; you could read them yourself, but basically I want to highlight the point that the Lord Jesus summoned the crowd with his disciples, and He said to them... He deliberately called them. He called them to Himself and He spoke to them. And He spoke to them in the presence of His disciples. Notice that in this situation, the Lord Jesus spoke of very deep truths, very important principles of the kingdom of God, the very foundation of our lives.

If we want to come after Him, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. He explains further what this means in the following verses. These are deep truths in the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus taught these to the crowds, not just to a very special group of people. The crowd included men, women, children often together with His disciples, although the Lord Jesus also spent time with His disciples on their own.

The disciples would generally be able to understand and benefit more because of the personal attention of the Lord Jesus, but the crowd in general could receive and benefit if their attitude was right.

Mark 10: 1

Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more *began* to teach them.

This verse is helpful for us to see that this was characteristic of the way the Lord Jesus spoke to the people. It was not just occasionally that He did it this way.

We are told that it was according to His custom. This means that it was His normal or usual way of helping the people understand the principles of the kingdom of God.

The crowds gathered around Him again and again, and the Lord Jesus spoke to them and He taught them again. This was His normal, usual way of response to the situation. He did not separate the crowd into separate groups of people in order to speak to them separately. He spoke to them together.

Mark 11: 18

The chief priests and the scribes heard *this*, and *began* seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

We see here the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching. This means that they were able to appreciate His teaching. They could understand, they could receive – they were astonished; and it refers to the crowd as a whole in general. It does not necessarily mean that every single person would have appreciated, but it is a general statement. The crowd as a whole could understand, appreciate.

Mark 12: 35-44. I will not read the whole passage, but just some parts to bring out the primary aspect.

Verse 35:

And Jesus *began* to say, as He taught in the temple, "How *is it that* the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?"

verse 37:

"David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?" And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him

Verses 41-44 tells us that He was sitting opposite the treasury and a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins. In that situation, He called His disciples to Him, and He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury".

So we see the Lord Jesus regularly taught in the temple, and the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him. They could appreciate what He was saying. At the same time, we see from time to time, the Lord Jesus would pay attention to His disciples, He would call them to Himself and He would speak to them.

Mark 14: 48-49 tells us that the Lord Jesus taught in the temple every day. **Verse 49**, He says:

Mark 14:49

"Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but *this has taken place* to fulfil the Scriptures."

So the Lord Jesus regularly taught in the temple and large crowds came to listen to Him.

Likewise, He travelled to different parts of the land of Israel and crowds followed Him everywhere. He spoke to them, He taught them, He healed their sick; He fed them when they were hungry.

So we may ask the question: Why does God do it this way rather than separating the people into children, youth and adults? Would that not be easier and more effective? Will the children be able to understand better if they were separated? The Lord Jesus would surely be able to help them even though they were children.

There are many reasons that I can see why God chooses to do it this way. The Lord willing, we will gradually consider this.

I will now tell you a real life story that may help us appreciate some aspects of this.

Many years ago, there was a famous preacher and many people came to listen to him, young and old. They were very eager to seek help from him and to listen to what he had to say.

In those days, there was often open air preaching and the preacher spent many hours with the people and he taught them many things. Sometimes, they followed him for a few days.

One day, it was getting late and the people were tired and hungry and they had no food. One of the men discovered that a boy in the crowd was willing to offer his small amount of food to help the hungry people. It was a small amount but he was prepared to part with it.

The preacher made use of the small amount of food and he succeeded in providing enough food for the many people who were there.

You may be saying this story is from the Bible. Yes, that is true.

Let us look at the description in the Scriptures to appreciate what the Lord has to tell us to help us understand His approach. There are different passages that tell this story and they complement to help us have a better understanding of the way the Lord Jesus spoke to the people.

John 6: 1-13 - this is a true story that happened many years ago, and it is good for us to read it again.

John 6: 1-13

- 1 After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).
- 2 A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.
- 3 Then Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples.
- 4 Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near.
- 5 Therefore Jesus, lifting up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these may eat?"
- 6 This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.
- 7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little."
- 8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him,
- 9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?"
- 10 Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.
- 11 Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.
- 12 When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost."
- 13 So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

This passage tells us that a lad (or it can be translated as "a little boy" or "a child") contributed to the Lord Jesus feeding about five thousand men.

This is a very interesting story and it helps us appreciate God's wisdom in working in this way. We know that the Lord Jesus could have fed the five thousand without any loaves of bread available. He could have done it by Himself but He chose to do it this way.

He wants us to see the meaningfulness of our participation in what He is doing. And in this instance, in His sovereignty, He worked through the contribution of this little boy. This little boy was present in the crowd of people following Him, listening to Him.

We know from the Scriptures that God loves a cheerful giver, and we can say, therefore, that it would likely mean that the lad gave his five barley loaves and two fish willingly and gladly to feed the people.

If he were not willing to part with his food, the Lord Jesus would not have accepted that. He would not have compelled him to give up his food. So the lad must have given up his food willingly. This would then tell us that he had a good attitude, and his presence in the crowd was a meaningful aspect of the way that God wanted to work in that situation.

We all know that not all children have such a good attitude. Many children are very self-centred; so too, adults.

But there are those who are positive and God wants us to see that when we have a positive attitude, we can actually contribute much even though we may be small and what we have may be little. What is important is the attitude and to what extent we are listening to what God has to say to us.

It is also interesting to note that the bread and the fish were brought to the Lord Jesus by an adult, by one of His disciples. So we see the relationship between the young and the older contributing to the whole process.

The disciples and other adults apparently had no food left. The people were hungry, the place was desolate; it was a place where they could not easily find food.

But here was a little boy who had some food, and he was willing to part with that food in order to help the hungry people. The Lord Jesus then performed this miracle to feed the people.

There are other passages in the Scriptures that are likely to be a description of the same event, and they tell us some other aspects of what happened at that time. We will look at two of these passages.

Mark 6: 34-44:

In this passage, we are told that the Lord Jesus saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. That is in **verse 34**.

So we are told that the Lord Jesus felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. The Lord Jesus cared for the crowd, the multitudes, and His primary concern was for their spiritual eternal well-being, and so He began to teach them many things. He spoke to them as a crowd, recognizing their need.

Verse 35 tells us:

When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and it is already quite late..."

And the disciples asked the Lord Jesus to send the crowd away ... into the surrounding countryside and villages so that they could buy themselves something to eat. Instead, the Lord Jesus performed this miracle to feed the five thousand as indicated in **verse 44**.

So this passage tells us the Lord Jesus taught them many things and the crowd listened to Him, and sometimes they followed Him for days.

Matthew 14: 13-21 records a very similar situation, likely the same event. In **verse 13**, we are told that the Lord Jesus withdrew ... in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard *of this*, they followed Him on foot from the cities.

So the Lord Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, He felt compassion for them and He healed their sick. So we are told He taught them, but He also healed their sick. And in that context, we see Him feeding them when they were hungry.

Verse 20 tells us: and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children. So here we are told specifically that women and children were together with the men, and they were fed and the young boy contributed to the feeding of the five thousand.

So we see in this context, the Lord Jesus was teaching the crowd, including the women and children. He healed their sick, He fed them. The little boy who offered the food to the Lord was one of the children present and his contribution to this occasion was a meaningful contribution in the eyes of God.

So this tells us that the children were there together with the adults, not only because they were being looked after by the adults physically, but also because they could learn and benefit from what the Lord Jesus was teaching and doing. And more than that, they could also contribute to the meaningfulness of the situation.

In the earlier message, we have seen that the children can properly come to God and they can be helped to grow in the kingdom of God.

This situation is rather similar to our time of worship. Parents can care for their children and the children can, at the same time, benefit from the time of worship, as well as contribute to the meaningfulness of our time of worship.

It is helpful for us to look at this whole issue afresh and to appreciate how God intends to communicate with us and to help us as His people.

There is another passage that helps us to see the meaningful participation of children in a context of worshipping God. This takes place in a context of a whole crowd of people.

Matthew 21: 1-16

- 1 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,
- 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied *there* and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me.
- 3 "If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."
- 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:
- 5 "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, 'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'"
- 6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them,
- 7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats.
- 8 Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road.
- 9 The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,
- 10 "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!"
- When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?"
- 11 And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."
- 12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.
- 13 And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN."
- 14 And *the* blind and *the* lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.
- 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant
- 16 and said to Him, "Do You hear what these *children* are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?"

In this context, we see the Lord Jesus coming into Jerusalem and it was in fulfilment of prophecy. The crowd were excited, they welcomed Him and they were shouting: "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!"

So when they entered Jerusalem, we are told that all the city was stirred, saying: "Who is this?" And the crowds replied: "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee." This tells us that there was some recognition, some appreciation of who the Lord Jesus was, and Jesus entered the temple.

We are then told that the chief priests and the scribes, when they saw all this and especially when they heard the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David", they were indignant.

Why were they indignant? Why were they so upset that the children should be proclaiming "Hosanna to the Son of David"?

It is quite likely that to them, the children were not in a position to understand these things. How could they be shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David"? It did not make sense, it was not proper, and they said to the Lord Jesus: "Do You hear what these *children* are saying?" They did not want the children to carry on to say those words.

But the Lord Jesus said to them: "Yes; have you never read, "OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?" The Lord Jesus contradicted them, the Lord Jesus taught them, and the Lord Jesus rebuked them: "Do you not understand that infants and nursing babies can even praise God?" The children were praising God: "Hosanna to the Son of David". They were appreciative of the Lord Jesus.

True, they might not fully understand what all that meant. So too, for the adults, how many truly appreciated the significance of all that they were saying?

But there was a direction. It was, in reality, praising God and the Lord Jesus. The children were doing this together with the adults. Their presence and what they said and did were meaningful to God. That is why the Lord Jesus quoted this passage: 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'. The children could genuinely and properly praise God in a way that would please God.

If that is true, then we should give adequate recognition to this and encourage all of us, whether young or old, to learn to praise God in the right way, in a meaningful way, to contribute to our time of gathering for worship together.

Children were often present during the occasions of the Lord Jesus ministering to the crowds of people. We saw this on the occasion of the feeding of the five thousand. We see the same indicated in the incident of the feeding of the four thousand.

Matthew 15: 29-39 - I will not read this whole passage, but it is rather similar to the feeding of the five thousand.

The Lord Jesus felt compassion for the people and in this instance, He said, "... because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat..." (This is in **verse 32**). He said, "I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way." And in this context, there were seven loaves and a few small fish and the Lord Jesus fed all these people.

Verse 38 tells us:

And those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children

So we see that the children were present among the people in the crowds and they listened, they learned together with the adults, and not as a separate group of children. They were able to benefit from what the Lord Jesus said and did, and this includes important principles of the kingdom of God.

There was once two groups of people attending a talk given by a well-known professor. Listen to this story carefully and see whether you can answer the question.

There were two groups of people, and they were attending a talk given by a well-known professor. During the talk, some members of the first group kept mumbling and saying that they did not understand what he was talking about. The second group asked the first group to keep quiet as they found the talk very interesting and helpful.

After the first talk, the two groups attended another talk given by a simple man. During the talk, all of them paid close attention and they all found the talk helpful.

Question: Who were in the first group and who were in the second group?

Some of you may think that the people in the first group were children and those in the second group were adults.

If you think so, you are wrong.

The people in the first group were not children. They were elderly uneducated farmers, while those in the second group were young children from a famous school.

The professor was giving a talk on unusual features of a mathematical puzzle. The elderly farmers did not understand what the professor was talking about but the children were enjoying his talk.

The talk given by the simple man was about the importance of being kind to one another, and practical ways of helping one another in times of difficulty.

Both the groups found the talk helpful to them because this was a subject for the heart, while the first talk was a subject for the brain.

So the children from the famous school, they studied mathematics. That talk was very interesting to them; they wanted to listen and they could understand. The farmers could not understand what was going on – they were not educated.

So sometimes, we may think that children do not understand but in reality, they may understand better than adults in some situations.

In the spiritual realm, this is especially important. The Scriptures show to us, and in life experiences we also know, that our understanding of spiritual reality is not primarily based on age. Our understanding of spiritual meaning and reality is primarily based on the attitudes of our hearts.

When we love God, God will teach us and God will show to us important principles. He will help us to understand even though we may be young. We may be very intelligent, we may be very old in years, but we can be very foolish when it comes to spiritual reality.

The apostle Paul was angry with the Corinthians, many of whom were adults but they were very fleshly, they were carnal because of wrong attitudes, and he said, "I can only feed you with milk, not solid food", which you will expect to be given to children, but the apostle Paul could not give them solid food because their attitudes were not good.

So how God speaks to us has very much to do with the attitudes of our heart. How much we receive and learn has very much to do with that.

In life situations, God speaks to the world generally as a whole group of people without dividing them into separate age groups, and God can speak to each one according to his or her own need and the stage of development.

Even when the Lord Jesus spoke the same words in the hearing of all the people, we know that in reception, in receiving what He said, different people would receive differently depending on the attitude of heart, depending on how God would bring across the meaning to them.

John 16: 8-11

- 8 "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;
- 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;
- 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;
- 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

The Lord Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit coming into this world. And He says, "the Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment". These are moral issues, matters of the heart, and He will speak to the hearts of all in the world. It is a spiritual message and it reaches the hearts of all those who listen.

So we see that young and old can all benefit from what God wants to say to them if their hearts are positive because the message is for the heart. Children can benefit as well as contribute meaningfully to such a gathering of young and old listening to what God has to say.

For those who want to study this subject more thoroughly, I will refer to you various Scriptural passages for you to study on your own, as there are many passages and it will take us too long to go through them. I will mention the reference and just a few points regarding them.

Luke 4: 14-22 tells us of the beginning of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, and it tells us that it was His custom to enter the synagogue on the Sabbath, and they listened to Him.

Luke 4: 28 tells us all *the people* in the synagogue were filled with rage even though earlier on they were all speaking well of Him.

Luke 4: 42-44 tells us the crowds were searching for Him.

Luke 5: 1-3 tells us the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God. It also tells us the Lord Jesus taught the people from the boat.

Luke 5: 15 and 16 tell us large crowds were gathering to hear *Him* and to be healed of their sicknesses.

Luke 6: 17-20 tells us a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, came to hear Him as well as to be healed. In this context, we are told He turned His gaze toward His disciples.

And then **Luke 7: 1** tells us: When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. So while He concentrated on the disciples, yet He was conscious to speak in the hearing of the people.

Luke 7: 9 tells us the crowd followed Him.

Luke 7: 11 tells us His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd.

Luke 7: 24 tells us He began to speak to the crowds about John the Baptist.

Luke 8: 19 tells us His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd.

Luke 9: 11 tells us the crowds were aware and they followed Him; and He welcomed them and He spoke to them about the kingdom of God and He cured those who had need of healing.

Luke 14: 25-27 tells us large crowds were going along with Him and in that situation, the Lord Jesus spoke to them words that would be very difficult for them to receive.

Luke 19: 47-48 tells us He was teaching daily in the temple.

John 7: 31-32 tells us many of the crowd believed in Him; and when the Pharisees heard the crowd muttering, they sent officers to seize Him.

John 7: 43 tells us a division occurred in the crowd because of Him.

There are many other passages, but these are just some examples for you to look at, to appreciate the approach of the Lord Jesus.

We can see the same approach in those who serve God in preaching the gospel. John the Baptist preached to the crowds without separation into young and old.

You can read this in **Luke 3**, and we are told in **verse 2**:

...the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

Luke 3: 7 tells us:

So he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Chapter 3 verse 10:

And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?"

Verse 18:

So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people.

John the Baptist approached it the same way. He preached to the crowds without separation into young and old, and they understood him; they responded to him.

We see the same thing in the preaching of the apostles as recorded in **Acts of the Apostles**.

Acts 8: 5-6

- 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and *began* proclaiming Christ to them.
- 6 The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

Here, Philip is one of the preachers of the gospel, not specifically mentioned as an apostle, but fulfilling the ministry of proclaiming Christ to the crowds.

Acts 13: 44 and 45 record the apostle Paul preaching to the people and we are told the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and *began* contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.

The apostle Paul preached to the crowds – nearly the whole city assembled to listen.

Acts 17: 16-17

- 16 ...while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.
- 17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

So we are told that the apostle Paul was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

There was no separation into different groups of people. He spoke to all those who were present, those who happened to be there. He regularly did so every day.

So we see that the approach that God has taken in speaking to the people of the world generally, including believers, is that He spoke to them as a whole group of people and He expected them to understand, whether young or old.

And the Scriptures show us clearly enough that even children can understand and not just understand, but also respond as well as contribute in the direction of praising God, worshipping God and building His kingdom, contributing to the adults as well.

Why does God do it this way? Why does He speak to the whole group instead of to smaller separate groups divided by age or other features?

I will share with you a few possible reasons which you can see in the Scriptures, you can see working out in life, and you can see that it is very helpful for us. You can think through and consider other aspects, but for today, I will just share with you some aspects for you to consider.

When God deals with us in this way, there are many beneficial aspects.

One aspect of it is that it is a wholesome context of relating with the different people. When we divide into small groups based on age, or profession, or intelligence, or financial circumstances, or education, or status, while there are helpful aspects for limited purposes, it very easily leads to complications and problems. We may not properly appreciate other people.

We are living in a society with all kinds of people. God wants us to learn to relate with different people. So when He speaks to a whole group of people and all of us are listening, we can discuss with one another what is He saying and in so discussing, we understand one another better.

So it is a context for us to learn together.

Also, when God speaks to us in this way, it helps us to understand the realities of life in this world. When we are divided into very different groups, we can become very sheltered from what is actually taking place in the world at large.

When young children constantly meet among themselves and talk only children's talk, they may not be prepared to face the difficulties of life. Yes, there are times when that can be helpful in a limited way, but we must be careful to help children to grow up, understand the realities of life wherever possible.

Yes, there is a need for some regulation; there is a need for wisdom.

So it is true there are certain issues that God may not speak to everyone at the same time. That is why He does also speak to some people in some special situations, some groups in certain contexts. For example, He does speak to the apostles different from what He would speak to the people in general. But God often does speak to the whole group of people.

So too, in church life: He often speaks to us as a whole group of people, regardless of our age as well as our spiritual level of development.

When God does it this way, it also helps us to learn to be understanding towards others.

When we are preoccupied with ourselves, our own thoughts, our own context, our own situation, we may not be very understanding towards other people in their situations. We may think that we are right, that what we think of is the best, but we may not realize that other people think very differently from us.

When we learn to relate in this way, we begin to understand and to see things from other people's points of view, and this can help us to learn to build our character and to help contribute to the building up of the body of Christ.

It also helps us to learn to look beyond ourselves and our own needs.

It is very common for people to concentrate on their own needs and very often people say, "This meeting is not very helpful to me because my need is not met. I want this, but I do not get it." It is very common for us to approach meetings in this way. But God wants us to learn to look beyond ourselves and our own needs.

When we learn to appreciate other people, when we learn to appreciate what God is doing, then we will find that in reality our needs will be met. Our needs may not be what we think we need because very often, they are very self-centred kinds of considerations. Our real needs lie in our character development, and that is an area that is very difficult to meet.

God wants us to be unselfish, but we are so self-centred, and the more we want people to give to us, the more self-centred we can become.

But when we learn to look beyond ourselves to concentrate on what is meaningful to God, what is God seeking to do, to listen to Him and to appreciate others, then we will find that our needs will be met, we will grow and we will develop.

The way that God is doing also helps us to see the importance of concentrating on the moral and spiritual meaning and reality.

We tend to think of things and people in terms of the physical, the temporal, the natural. We think of age, we think of status in society, we think of education, we think of property. When we look at other people, we tend to think in this way, and we divide people into these groups.

But when God speaks to us, He concentrates, first and foremost, on one thing: our heart. And when we concentrate on this, we will begin to understand many things which we otherwise will not understand.

When God spoke to Adam when He created him, Adam was just created – you can say he was a baby. In the spiritual realm, he was just created, but he could understand what God was saying.

So too when God creates each one of us and gives us spiritual existence in this world, we are moral beings, we can understand moral and spiritual issues.

Of course, there are physical limitations that can affect us in various ways, but the primary issue still is the matter of the heart, and when we concentrate on the moral and spiritual meaning and reality, we will learn to identify with God and what He is doing.

So while there are other qualifications, there are other factors to bear in mind, it is important for us to concentrate on this. This is the primary issue and throughout the Scriptures, if you read right through from **Genesis** to **Revelation**, you will see this emphasis throughout. God concentrates on the heart regardless of who we are. It is always the same message.

Also, the Lord wants us to take care to ensure the right spirit within us, if we are to receive what God has to say.

Many a time, even the disciples could not understand what the Lord Jesus was saying because they were preoccupied with their own thoughts and desires; they argued with one another who was the greatest when the Lord Jesus was preparing for the event of the cross.

They were not able to appreciate the woman with the alabaster vial expressing her devotion to the Lord because their hearts were not identified with what was in the heart of the Lord, and they rebuked the woman; they scolded her instead.

If we are to learn and benefit, we must ensure the right spirit in our hearts: humble and contrite; whatever our age, we can benefit.

The Lord also wants us to know that all of us can contribute meaningfully to one another. There is no limit. Any one of us can contribute – the principle of the body of Christ – every member can contribute. Every member of God’s creation in the moral realm has a moral contribution that he can make.

Also, God wants us to learn from others who are very different from us in various ways. Others go through different experiences, they look at life differently in various ways, but at the heart of it, all of us need the same thing, all of us need to know the same thing. We need to know God, we need to be transformed in our hearts, we need to know true value in life; we need to lay up treasures in heaven. All this is the same for all of us, but we may express it in different ways, we may have gone through different circumstances. And if we learn to understand others without concentrating on their physical characteristics, whether young or old, and other features like that, there are many things that we can learn from one another.

There are times when I have spoken to children and I found myself very encouraged by what they could understand, appreciate and express, not just because of intelligence, but because of the meaning in their heart, that there is a reality within them. They could appreciate spiritual meaning, which was rather surprising because many adults would not have been able to appreciate that.

So I see that God looks at our heart, whoever we are, and He is prepared to help us.

Yes, our physical age does pose some limitations in some ways; we need to bear that in mind as well. There is also a place for us to have some gatherings for different groups of people in order to help in specific areas in a limited form, but we need to exercise care in terms of the whole approach to this, to seek to understand how God does it, and to identify with Him.

The Lord willing, I will consider with you the other three categories so that we can see the picture more fully.

How did God communicate with the nation of Israel as a group of people? How does God communicate with believers as a group of people worshipping God? And how does God communicate with specific individuals and specific smaller groups?

As we look at this whole context, it may help us to know how we should respond and how we can more effectively respond to God's call to be faithful to Him, to do it His way and not our way or the ways of the majority, or the ways of the world, or the ways that many people do it.

However, there is much for us to learn and in whatever way we can improve in the direction of being more effective to do God's will, we need to listen to one another as we contribute our part. And that is an aspect of what God intends in outworking of church life, that every member of the body of Christ can contribute and we can grow together.

God loves each one of us and He wants to help every one of us, whether young or old, in whatever way we are prepared to receive from Him.

The Lord Jesus died on the cross, not just for adults, but for children as well and anyone can respond to Him.

We can love Him, we can obey Him, if we want to. So too, all of us can reject God's offer if we are not prepared to repent and to trust Him.

So let us, as we consider how God speaks to us, ask Him to help us to identify with Him: What does He want to accomplish and how should we fulfil our part to respond to His call?