

Spiritual senses

I was due to give the Sunday morning talk, at Ashley, on 29th March 2020. Since the lockdown prevented that from happening, I thought it might be helpful to share my notes with you.

I've been considering this question: is the Lord with each one of us and how do we sense his presence?

Is the Lord with us, now? I think so! In the Old Testament book of Job, after some terrible things happen to Job, he feels that God has deserted him. Later in the story, the Lord starts to interact with Job and his friends. From the things He says, I think we can tell that He was, in fact, present with them the whole of the time. It's just that they weren't aware of this.

Here's Jeremiah 29:11-14:

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹²Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.

Those are the words the Lord spoke through Jeremiah, even when Israel had been rebellious, chasing after false gods. The Lord sent Israel into exile, but He still planned to bring them back to Himself, when the time was right. It seems to me that the Lord so wants to be with His people.

So, how do we sense the Lord's presence with us? Some find that this come naturally, but for others, it's not so obvious.

We have physical senses:

1. Sight
2. Sound
3. Smell
4. Taste
5. Touch

But are those our only senses? Sometimes, we speak of a "sixth sense", but I wonder if there's more than just a sixth. What if for each of the physical senses, we also have an equivalent spiritual sense? Does the Bible support that? And what do our senses do for us? Just a few, brief thoughts about each follow...

Sight

Deuteronomy 29:1-6 is about the renewal of the covenant:

¹These are the terms of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in Moab, in addition to the covenant he had made with them at Horeb.

²Moses summoned all the Israelites and said to them:

Your eyes have seen all that the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. ³With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those signs and great wonders. ⁴But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear. ⁵Yet the LORD says, "During the forty years that I led you through the wilderness, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet. ⁶You ate no bread and drank no wine or other fermented drink. I did this so that you might know that I am the LORD your God."

Verse 2: ...Your own eyes have seen...

Verse 3: ... With your own eyes you saw...

Verse 4: ... But to this day the Lord has not given you ... eyes that see...

There appears to be a contradiction, but verses 2 and 3 are talking about physical sight, whereas verse 4 is speaking of something else, perhaps spiritual sight, which might be closely akin to insight.

We enjoy seeing the world. Sight also keeps us safe and helps us understand our environment. If I walk around with my eyes closed, how long will it be before I have an accident? Perhaps there is a spiritual sight which helps me see and understand something of the Lord. Perhaps it also helps me see injustice and other things, which the Lord is concerned about.

Sound

Mark 4:3-9 is the Lord's parable of the sower, or the soil:

³ "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

⁹ Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear: the people had physical ears and would have heard what he was saying. I think Jesus was, again, referring to something in their spirit, spiritual hearing.

Also, Revelation's 7 letters to the churches, Revelation 2:7,11,17,29, 3:6,13,22, each closes with words that include, "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

It encourages us to listen to what the Holy Spirit says.

I have a physical hearing problem. Often, if I can't hear what someone is saying, I ask Claire to listen and tell me what is being said. She is my wife and I am tuned in to her voice, so I hear it more easily from her. Perhaps there is also spiritual hearing, which helps us to tune in to the Lord. I believe it also helps us to discern, setting off alarm bells in our spirit, when something is not right.

Smell

In 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, Paul is discussing some of his ministry and experience:

¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life.

It's the same aroma that can be, for some, death and for others, life. It seems to depend on the state of the person. I don't think that's at all physical, but something spiritual.

Smell can tell us something about our environment and sometimes warns us – perhaps we smell fire, and we must do something about it. Sometimes, it's like there is a sweet spiritual smell of the Lord's presence. Other times, our spiritual sense of smell tells us to be cautious or warns us to stay away from something that isn't good.

Taste

Psalms 34:8-9 is a psalm of David:

⁸ Taste and see that the LORD is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

⁹ Fear the LORD, you his holy people,
for those who fear him lack nothing.

So, if we are to taste the Lord, is He made of chocolate? I hope not! I believe that he's made of something even better – in fact, much better! Perhaps this is not referring to physical taste, at all, but the spiritual taste of experiencing God's Holy Spirit.

There are pleasant and bad tastes. It helps me decide, shall I swallow what is in my mouth, for sustenance and to do me good? Or is it bad and I should spit it out? Perhaps there is a spiritual sense of taste, which helps me discern. E.g. should I allow what someone is teaching into my mind, so it affects the way I think and operate? Or should I distance myself from it – i.e. spit it out? Is that teaching really what the Lord wants for us?

Touch

Mark 6:53-56 follows after feeding the five thousand and Jesus walking on the water, to meet his disciples: ⁵³ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. ⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. ⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

They touched Jesus's cloak physically, but the Lord touched them spiritually, with power to heal. I'm not sure that we ever touch people purely physically. When I touch someone, I feel that something in our spirits also touches. We can and want to bless. We should also be careful to do no harm.

How aware are we?

Do we realise that we have these spiritual senses?

Perhaps this anecdote, from my past might be worth thinking on. It happened some years ago. With certain movements, I was experiencing sudden and significant pain in my shoulder. Eventually, I went to my G.P. and he referred me to a physiotherapist. She examined me, getting me to make various movements and finally said, "can you extend your arm". I didn't know what she meant, so she did it, herself – it's a simple movement, which I would have shown you, visually, if I'd given the talk. Anyway, I could see she was doing it, but I still didn't know how to do it, myself. You see, I probably hadn't made that movement since childhood. I'd completely forgotten how to! With lack of exercise, the muscles needed for it had become flabby and lacked power, which made it difficult, anyway. However, eventually, the penny dropped and I was able to make some of that movement. The physio gave me some exercises to do and told me to come back in one week's time. Upon my return, I was able to make those movements pain free. She gave me several exercises to do, to recover those muscles.

I could make that movement of my shoulder and I hadn't even known it. It's amazing what things we can have and not realise it. Perhaps it's the same with the spiritual senses. Sometimes, we need to realise that we have them, awaken them, have some faith, try them, exercise them and see where the Lord takes us.

I believe that these spiritual senses can help us to be more in tune with the Lord, as well as more aware of the Lord's presence with us and His desire to work in us and through us. Then, we relate to Him more and more: not just because we are at church, or it's the right time and place, etc., but we develop a life of worship, a life of prayer. We relate to the Lord, not just because we should, but because it becomes natural to do so and we enjoy His presence.

So, what next?

Some things which I have found helpful are:

- Read the bible, every day - to read it right through and to keep reading it, so it soaks in. In this way we can assimilate and gain a greater faith and relationship with the Lord. It opens to us a bigger picture. We can

explore many different versions of the bible, in the English language and there are lots of bible reading tools to choose from – it's quite a privilege!

- Pray. Years ago, I remember Claire challenging me to pray with her each day. At first, it seemed strange, intimidating, even. However, now, we start most days with prayer together. It's become a part of the job. Fasting can be a part of it, too, but I think that's something for consideration. We can ask for prayer, as well, from within the Ashley family.
- Talk to the Lord (you could say that's another aspect of prayer): another thing which seemed strange, to me, at first. For the first ten years, or so, of being a Christian, I felt that my relationship with the Lord was one way. I prayed, I worshipped, but I wasn't aware of the Lord responding. Eventually, something changed. Sometimes I ask questions of the Lord and, on occasions, I've been surprised by His immediate response. I remember, once, asking Him how He sees Brexit. I received an immediate reply: "Let the dead bury there dead, but you follow me." I was quite taken aback – that wasn't what I was expecting! I must remember that 1 John 4 warns us to test the spirit. As I read scripture, pray, worship, take counsel, these things often seem to fit together and help to build that bigger picture. And, sometimes, I probably get it wrong, but there isn't much that the Lord can't recover.
- Try to be in the right place at the right time: sometimes, that's Claire and me, together, sometime me alone. Sometimes go somewhere quiet, or go for a walk, or whatever works...
- Sometimes, it's good to be creative, with the Lord: to include Him in our hobbies, whatever they may be, for each of us. I'm sure he's interested!

There are all sorts of things which might help: different things for different people.

Well, I think that's all for now. God bless and stay safe.

Steve W.