

## God Utters Voice/The Earth Melts!

As mariners in the Indian Ocean know, there are still....pirates. Twenty-first century captains no longer fear Blackbeard, or flintlock pistols tucked into a silken sash. Today they worry more about Somali pirates -- bouncing across the waves in speedboats, racing to overtake slow-moving container ships many times their size.

Pirate assaults these days are about speed, proximity, and brutality. If the pirates can get within range, their automatic weapons and bloodthirsty ways are more than a match for most lightly armed merchant-marine crews. For the ship captains, it's all about keeping the pirates far away.

Fortunately, many merchant-marine and cruise ships that ply the Indian Ocean are now equipped with an effective defensive weapon that does just that. A Long Range Acoustic Device was first used in 2005...by the civilian cruise ship Seabourn Spirit....when they drove off an attack by Somali pirates.

Most of the cruise ship's 115 passengers were still slumbering, asleep in their cabins.... when two boatloads of pirates raced up and started spraying the ship with automatic-weapons fire. A few of the crew tried to swamp the pirates with the ship's fire hoses, but.... it was the newly installed LRAD that saved the day.

This acoustic weapon resembles a small satellite dish. A crew member pointed it at the speedboats and hit the pirates with 150 decibels of concentrated noise. The powerful blast of sound causes excruciating headaches and ear pain, even temporary loss of vision and other physiological problems. In this case, when the Seabourn Spirit was attacked, it caused the pirates to turn tail and flee the scene, no doubt saving many innocent lives.

~ ~ This may be 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, but the concept is a lot older -- as old as the Bible.

Psalm 29....bursts with a Heavenly **Cacophany**, describing the *impact* of God's voice:

- + The voice of the Lord thunders! **Boom!**
- + The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars! *Snap!*
- + The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire! *Crack!*
- + The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness! *Rumble! (like theater thunder)*
- + The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl! *Whoosh!*

And all the people say "Glory!" (v. 9)

The psalmist - portrays the God of Israel, ...as a **storm** God.... more powerful than Baal. *And this storm* drives the faithful *not* to 'disreputable places," but rather - to the Temple. Heaven's children flee for sanctuary to God's House, where all say "Glory!"

This psalm was associated with temple worship.. on a *high holy day*. God's storm-voice is echoed by members of the worshiping congregation. **Then** the choir thunders back, "Glory!"

Hear how God's voice is different?!

Sonic weapons are designed to send wrongdoers away -- screaming; **God's** - sonic - boom -- the thunder of Heaven, the breaking of cedars and shaking of oaks -- is intended to **woo us**..and the world to come closer. The vox dei, Voice of God.... is a voice that can cause nations to gather in awe and to sing together "Glory!"

Yet, *as eager as we think we are* - to hear the voice of God, we can also be remarkably resistant to it.

Poet Gerard Manley puts it this way, "Our vision of glory is impaired. In part, because our inner faculties of perception have become dulled and distorted. When we are not alert within ourselves, we are not aware of the glory, even when it is glaring us in the face... like the brilliance of the rising sun breaking through the darkness of the early morning. Our vision is dimmed also... because the glory is polluted or driven down. 'Generations have trod, have trod, have trod....and all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil.' Our abuse of the environment, the way we have built our cities, ..developed our lifestyles, has trampled earth's glory. 'The soil is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.' We have walked over earth's glory with boots of insensitivity."

> This...is twelfth night. Just twelve days ago we celebrated the birth of God's living Word. The nativity, as we typically picture it, is nothing like a Thunder of sound. Our poetic renditions of Jesus' birth are more akin to a whisper: "Silent night, all is calm, all is bright."

Or again: "How silently, how silently / The wondrous gift is given! / And God imparts to human hearts / The blessings of His heaven."

So...okay. There is.... a beauty, a somber, Heavenly - - **quiet**...about Christmas. ~ ~**But let's not abandon the psalmist's *wall of sound* too quickly.** Our desire for Christmas peace - may lead us to treasure "the little Lord

Jesus, asleep on the hay," *but Jesus' coming into the world* has a more powerful effect on the human race. Its **echoes**... still shakes our lives.

Here's.... how God's voice roars....in real life!

Video

<https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=skyh&p=video+of+song+%22glory%22#id=52&vid=0da27693b71f3918475ccc7352958c06&action=click>

Scripture ..calls Jesus Christ the logos, the Word of God (John 1:1). If the voice of the Lord "causes oaks to whirl and strips the forest bare," then surely we can trust the babe of Bethlehem -- or, more completely, the man he grows up to be -- to **shake us** from our sin and complacency!

The church needs to hear....God's voice today. *Heavens, **we** need it!*

Frederick Buechner\*\*... says: "We are so used to hearing what we want to hear ...and remaining deaf ..to what it would be well for us to hear ....that it is hard to break the habit. But if we keep our hearts and minds open as well as our ears, if we listen with patience and hope, *if we remember at all deeply and honestly*, then I think we come to recognize, beyond all doubt, that, however faintly we may hear him, Jesus is indeed speaking to us, and that, however little we may understand of it, his word to each of us is both recoverable and precious beyond telling."

Barbara Brown Taylor\* (who knows more about church trends than anyone else I know) puts it this way: "Those were the good old days: burning bushes, angels of the Lord, pillars of fire, parted seas, all those unmistakable signs of the presence of God. What wouldn't we give for one clear direction from the Lord, one burning bush to call us by name and tell us what to do? At least I think that is what I want. I stay so busy sometimes I wonder if I would see it; I wonder if I am so focused on my list of things to do that I would not notice a burning bush until I was scorched by it. And then, like Moses, I am afraid -- of what the bush might know about me, of what it might ask me to do. If I stay busy with the little things, maybe God will not notice me or see that I already have enough to do and call on someone else to do the big things. So I just hunch my shoulders, keep my head down, and mind my own business. A burning bush? I didn't see it. A thundering Voice? I haven't got time."

The thing is, we don't hear God with our ears. God speaks by means of the divine voice that resonates deep within our soul.

Paul says, "In these days God has spoken to us by a Son."

We need not wait... for a cacophony of sound, a Thunderclap from Heaven.

We can hear God's voice in a way far simpler and more subtle -- by simply walking...with the living Word, born in Bethlehem.

We can trust the silence, .....these days ....following Christmas. We can trust it.. for it is out of silence God most often speaks.

And the message -- the Word.... shepherds and magi and many people of faith down through the ages have discovered -- is that God speaks ....through Jesus!

Even today.

Even right now.

God....is still speaking!

Amen.